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ELBERT MOORE

(Former Scenario Editor)

Box 772 BA, Chicago

The Black Cat

VOL. XX. JANUARY, 1915 10c. a COPY. $1.00 a YEAR

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The Black Cat

Indisputable Proof

BY HAROLD de POLO

This is an up-to-the-minute story of a moving picture actor who wreaked his revenge while playing before the camera. But the circumstances which made possible the crime, when shown on the screen, convicted him.

HE Lone Bandit of Red Gulch Canyon!"

The flaming yellow letters on the glaring poster in front of the moving picture theatre caused my friend Stotesbury to come to an abrupt halt. A boyish smile of wholesome delight lit up his bearded and extremely dignified face as he gazed, quite fascinated, at the thrilling scene depicted on the multi-colored lithograph. He slapped me joyously on the back.

"Hang it, old man, I honestly *can't* let this one go. Gamble it's a corker, too. Come on; I've just about an hour or so to spare—what do you say?"

Now Stotesbury—Professor James Folsom Stotesbury—as all the world knows, is the foremost authority in the country on teaching the deaf and dumb to read the mouth and to frame their own mute lips so that others of their ilk may understand them, thus doing away with the slowness and tediousness of the sign language. He is, indeed, a very much sought-after and respected individual, so that all his friends laugh the more heartily at the utterly boyish craze of this highly dignified person for moving pictures—chiefly "thrillers," as he himself frankly says. Therefore, you will see that it is no wonder that the wild title and still wilder poster made it impossible for him to pass the place by without entering. It surely *did* look promising, as he fervently assured me.

Once inside and seated, it was fairly amusing to see with what impatience my friend awaited the flashing on the screen of the film which he vowed showed promise of being such a thriller. But fortune was with him. After two short reels there came the wild and wonderful Western picture he was so anxious to see.

In my own humble estimation, it surely must have been a very gratifying thing for one who liked the style of photo-plays that Stotesbury did. There were train robberies, dynamited bridges and trestles, furious chases on horseback, a brave young cow-girl, a marvelous bad man—the lone bandit—by the name of Sandy Pete, and the inevitable young hero sheriff who, of course, got the reward for the out-

law in the end, as well as the girl's fair hand. Yes—without doubt, Stotesbury enjoyed it immensely. The ending, too, was apparently quite satisfactory. It finally got to the point where the villian and the sheriff met, on the sandy, sun-scorched plain, with only one gun between them and only one bullet in the weapon. A most marvelous and titanic struggle took place, during which, of course, the gun went off and the villain received the bullet in his black and wicked heart. Then came, naturally, the girl herself in rescue of her loved one. Whether or not they fell into each other's arms immediately, I cannot say. Stotesbury suddenly rose to his feet, bade me follow him, and made his way to the street in some haste.

"My—my dear fellow," I expostulated, "what in the deuce is the matter? Fancy *your* leaving the place when still another promising film is coming!"

Stotesbury, I noticed, did not smile. Instead, he stroked his beard slowly. "Hum! Let me see!—that was an *Individual* film, eh? Ah, yes, their place is up in Mount Vernon! By the way, like to drop up there for a few moments? You—you might possibly be interested!"

"What?" I questioned.

"Yes. Mind coming along?"

I grasped him by the arm. "See here, old man, what in the world *is* the matter?"

Stotesbury looked at me with that deadly serious expression I have sometimes seen him wear. "Never mind. Just come along, if you want to. I—I really feel sure, though, that you'll be extremely interested and surprised. What do you say about it?"

And, try as I might, I could not get another word out of him. Therefore, knowing him as I did, I realized that it really might be worth while, if only for amusement, to accompany him.

In a trifle over an hour we had found our way to the studio of the Individual Film Company, just on the outskirts of Mount Vernon. Stotesbury, at the door, presented his card and said that he wished to see the manager on very important matters. His dignified and highly commanding presence caused the boy to admit us instantly and usher us into the private office.

In a moment or so the manager made his appearance. He was a stout, florid person, with a heavy, experienced face that seemed to say he had seen the world in all its phases.

"Professor Stotesbury?" he inquired abruptly, advancing and eyeing us speculatively.

"At your service, Mr. ——" Stotesbury stepped forward, his eyebrows raised interrogatively.

"Gandil, sir," put in the other. "Otto B. Gandil, sir, general manager and part owner of the Individual Film Company." This last with a proud and mighty bluster.

"Very good, Mr. Gandil," answered Stotesbury. "Ah, by the way, I have just seen your really remarkable film, 'The Lone Bandit of Red Gulch Canyon'!"

Without doubt, Mr. Otto B. Gandil was a person who took great pride in his productions. He rubbed his hands together energetically—all fat people do, it seems—and chuckled with supreme satisfaction. "Well, well, well!

Pretty good stuff, eh—pretty—good—stuff!"

Then, very suddenly, I noticed that he dropped his eyes and that a bit of the red left his cheeks. Also, his hands made their way to his gaudy watch-chain and he coughed several times in an embarrassed manner.

"Yes," continued Stotesbury, and it struck me that his voice was strangely low and even, "it *is* good stuff, as you call it—exceedingly interesting stuff, I might say! Ah! you wouldn't mind telling me, would you, just exactly what happened to your villian, Sandy Pete, in that last scene where he and the sheriff struggle for the revolver?"

Gandil coughed again. He seemed very ill at ease. "Why—why—" He paused helplessly; finally, though, he raised his head and eyed Stotesbury with shifting eyes. "Why, to tell you the truth, Professor, that—that is one of the—the unfortunate accidents—the *only* accident, I should say—that the Individual Film Company has ever met with. The—the stage manager who was under me at the time put—put a real bullet into the revolver by mistake, instead of the blank cartridge. It—when it went off in the struggle, Remick was killed—killed, poor fellow, immediately. We have settled with his family—we have had the matter looked into—it has been proven that it was entirely an accident due to the unfortunate negligence of one of our own men. He has been discharged. It—it happened about two years ago. We—we have, naturally, tried to have the matter hushed up in the papers—such a thing you know, never does a concern any good. Yes, it was very, very unfortunate—very, very, very," and so he trailed along, his voice presently going off into an unintelligible mumble.

Stotesbury plucked thoughtfully at his beard, while I wondered what in the world he was trying to get at. Presently he drawled out slowly, "Ah, so Sandy Pete's real name *was* Remick, eh? Good—very good!"

"Yes—Remick! Tyson Remick!" Gandil assured him.

Still Stotesbury stroked his beard. "By the way, Mr. Gandil, is it possible that the—the chap who played the sheriff in the thing is still with you?"

Gandil, looking puzzled, eyed Stotesbury queerly. "Why—why, surely! In fact, now that you mention it, he's upstairs in the studio rehearsing a new part—a wonderful part, in four reels—'The Awakening of a Millionaire'! I'm sure you'll enjoy it, sir—sure! It's one of the—" And, his professional sense of pride aroused, he went off into a lengthy dissertation on the merits of the film that was to be such a masterpiece—"The great American picture masterpiece, sir, I assure you!"

My friend heard him through with the utmost patience. Then, still in his calm and even voice, asked if he might have the pleasure of speaking to the chap who had played the sheriff for just a moment or so.

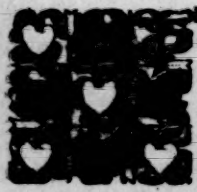
For the first time, Gandil appeared to resent the intrusion of this stranger and his abrupt questions and air of authority. "Say—say, what *is*

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 50]

The Cutover

BY EUGENE LAMAR

A commonplace, but gripping drama is played on a New Year's Eve, with the unusual setting of a manhole, the brain center of a great telephone system in a big city.



THE cable helper kicked irritably at the little lizard-like water dog that was investigating his feet and sent it scurrying noiselessly with a score of its kind, back into the darker recesses of the manhole. The helper was seated on a rough box in the bottom of the hole with a test receiver strapped over his ear, waiting the call from his chief, the cableman.

On either side swung the big telephone cables, curved sinuously around the contour of the hole, as if so many slimy reptiles had paused in their crawling through the subterranean passages. A sepulchral quiet pervaded the underground, disturbed only by the continual drip, drip of seepy water, and the low rumble of traffic in the street.

"Hello, Jim! Hello!" the words, abrupt in the little receiver, startled him into activity. His chief was calling.

"All right!" and he clapped the receiver quickly back to his ear for instruction.

"Put your test wire on the white," called the faint metallic voice, "and don't go to sleep on this job again tonight, or you'll lose it, like you did that girl."

The helper winced a bit and swore softly, as he ran his fingers over the stubby ends of the little copper wires of the newly installed cable. They were bared where the sheath had been stripped back for test and splicing. Each pair of wires was spiralled together through the long cable to the Telephone Exchange, insulated with their wrappings of tissue paper—red and white on alternate ones.

He connected the two dry-cell batteries that were swinging from a string before him, to the "white" wire of the pair his test set was "on."

"O. K.," he shouted into the receiver, his voice echoing harshly back into his ears from the close brick walls. Then he listened closely.

"Put them in the test board as I call their numbers."

Then began the routine of testing and assigning numbers for each of the six hundred pair of wires, so they might be spliced to the wires of another cable.

The helper used a small pair of snips, the handles of which were wired to his test set, for "putting battery" on the cable pairs for testing. It was his work to answer, "O. K.," as the cableman in the central office called each pair, and poke the wires through the numbered holes in a small board he held.

They were working over-time that

night, finishing up the last splices for the cutover, which would put the new Walnut Exchange in operation at midnight. With their work finished, the cutover would consist merely of throwing in the main battery fuse at the new switchboard and pulling out the line coils at the old board down town. Hundreds of telephone lines would be transferred in the twinkling of an eye—if every man's work had been well done.

The monotony of the testing wore on, and despite his chief's half jocular warning, the helper was again working absent-mindedly—"asleep on the job." He was thinking of the girl, the operator. He wondered if she would be on duty at the new Exchange that night, when they cut it into service.

A year before, they had met in the little village nearby, where he and the cableman had gone to clear some "aerial trouble." The helper had laughed good-naturedly at the little single-position switchboard she alone presided over, and told her fascinating stories of the big city exchanges, with scores of operators busy at long stately rows of switchboards. When he had gone back to the city, they wrote foolish love letters, and on Sundays, after pay days, he would go out to the village to visit her.

These visits were to her unsophisticated mind, colorful glimpses of magic city life. She grew discontented with the monotony of the sleepy village and longed to feel the thrill and be part of the throbbing city, as she imagined it—and be nearer him. So she came to the city one day in early spring, alone and unknown to the helper, for it was to be a surprise to him.

He was a very puzzled chap, as he came in response to her call that afternoon.

"I just wanted you to help me find a boarding house," she gaily announced, to add to his amazement.

"Find—find what?"

"A boarding house. I have just begun work here in the Mabry Exchange," she explained. "I know I am going to like it, Jim. It's just grand. I can hardly wait till morning to begin again. Aren't you glad?"

Somehow, he was glad, for her confidence was infectious. And the two, filled with the spirit of youth and happiness, lived for the future.

Together, they spent the evenings and Sundays she was off duty, happy, because the world was young. Many a tired business man was cheered by the joy-note in Helen's voice over his telephone throughout the day.

The helper was light-hearted and began to think and plan for the future, when he would be promoted; for now it meant a great deal to them.

Then—enter the clerk: sleek, well-dressed and smooth-handed. How he and Helen met, the helper never just knew; for, as ever so, his advent quickly silenced the sweet exchange of confidence between the lovers.

The clerk could better entertain, do the little inconsequential things with a greater nicety than could the blunt helper. And the girl was fascinated by his agreeable manners.

Before, she had thought a trolley ride or a movie party with Jim, the height of Metropolitan luxury. But now, with the clerk, it was taxi-

cabs, real shows, and little late bites to eat before going home. She may not have forgotten the lowly helper, but there were a lot of things to occupy her mind; so many things, she had never dreamed before.

The helper must have known this, for he still loved the girl. Though that may have been because love sometimes laughs at wills as well as at locksmiths.

But his thoughts were bitter, as the events of the old year came to mind in retrospection, while he sat there solitary, in the manhole, mechanically hurrying his work to a finish, 'ere the birth of the New Year—and the cutover at twelve o'clock.

When the last wire was tested, the helper called, "All done," and listened.

Came the voice of the chief: "Wrap up the splices; I won't have time to solder them now. You'll have to stay there in the hole tonight and clear the new trunk cable when they make the cutover."

"Me!" stammered the helper at his receiver.

"Yes, you. There's a big fire down town and every man on the job has been pulled off to repair the burnt cables—just you and me left to pull this thing tonight. We gotta make good."

"Yes, sir, we have," echoed the reply; he strived to appear confident.

"Spring your cable out where you can get to it when the time comes," his chief was directing. "It's eleven-five now. Haven't got a watch, have you?"

"No, sir!"

"Well, listen for the New York whistles; they'll begin blowing at exactly twelve. When you hear 'em, saw the old cable off and don't be a second late or hell 'll be to pay."

Then the receiver was quiet and the helper began preparing for the night's work. Here in the junction manhole, where the conduits from the new Walnut Exchange joined those leading to all parts of the city, was the inter-office trunk line cable, connecting with all the other exchanges. It would be the life-giving artery, through which the pulsing stream of telephone calls would flow unceasing, to and from the new Exchange—after the cutover.

But just at midnight, when the Central Office installers were throwing in the battery fuse, some one must be in the underground and saw off the section of the cable made dead by the cutover; clearing the new trunk wires for the avalanche of calls sure to stream through them, when the New Year whistles woke up the city.

It was a simple thing—just cut down through the soft copper wires with a hack-saw, clear the wire ends, and do it promptly. But the chance of cutting the wrong cable, balling something up, unnerved the helper. Responsibility rested ill on his unaccustomed shoulders. He wondered if he were going to make good. He nervously arranged the tools again, and sat down on the box in the bottom of the hole, for the solitary wait. It was very quiet, except for the trickling of sewer water. The streets were deserted. Every one had gone either to bed or down town to usher in the New Year.

To pass away the time more quickly, the helper removed the paraffined

wrapping from a cable splice recently made and ran his receiver clips over the loose bunched wires, listening idly to the scraps of conversations flying here and there, from telephone to telephone. By accident, he came across one of the inter-office trunk circuits, in use between two of the old exchanges. It seemed fairly to throb with the constant stream of calls the busy operator crowded over it. The helper grew interested. From every station in life the messages came pouring hot, one close after the other, over the common trunk wire. And only a thoughtless chap there to listen to what would have been the delight of a philosopher!

First, a happy care-free greeting; then a last word of sad parting; now the excited cry of disaster, and a note of human despair; all the gamut it ran, up and down the life scale.

A voice, suave, calling the familiar number of the telephone at Helen's boarding house, startled the listener's flagging interest. It was the clerk!

"Hello, girlie!" he greeted her.

And the helper kicked a bucket of paraffin across the manhole.

She laughed a little joyful gurgle in reply.

"I've just learned that the cutover will be postponed on account of New Year's," the clerk was saying to her, "and since the operators will not be needed for extra duty tonight, we are inviting some of them to a little supper down town,—all proper and chaperoned, you know. I'll be out after you in a jiffy," he continued.

"Oh, that will be fine!" she cried; "I'll be ready. I was just starting for the Exchange."

"Be sweet till I get there," he called, as he hung up.

The listening helper was puzzled as well as angry.

The cutover postponed, and he left sitting there to cut the cable, with everybody going off to supper.

"It's funny, damned funny," he said to himself doubtfully.

Presently the clerk's voice came on again. Evidently he had immediately "flashed his hook" and held the same wire. He called a number and the helper strained the receiver to his ear.

"She fell for it," the clerk was telling some one. "We'll be down town in a taxi in a mighty few minutes. Drop around to the wine room at Josie's and I'll show her to you. She's some swell little dame."

"How are you going to get by with it?" the other fellow was asking.

"Oh, I'll—tell her the others are delayed, or anything, till I can get her to take a little drink or two; then she won't care—maybe. And we'll all have a jolly little New Year's feed."

"Good luck then," the other laughed. "I'll drop around." Up went the receivers.

The helper sat stunned with surprise, staring vacantly at the incandescent hanging before him. The clerk had been lying and the cutover was not going to be postponed after all.

But Helen; he remembered bitterly, her joyous acceptance of the invitation to the supper.

"Maybe she'll be surprised, too, in a little while. It's none of my busi-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 54)

The Hoodooed Story

BY HY. W. COATES

A rejected story is a disagreeable experience for any writer, but we wager no rejected manuscript before ever brought such a series of mis-adventures and disappointments as this one.

BY past experience, "Shorty" Elliot knew there was only one antidote for the bite of the literary bug—that was "to get it down on paper." He had written reams and reams of newspaper "copy," yet he would itch and tingle every once in a while, to do something in the way of writing that would "break into" the magazine field.

Always it was the same result—a little printed card, delicately worded, so as not to wound the author's feelings, with the stock phrase, "This rejection does not necessarily imply lack of literary merit."

Most of the time, when a bulky return envelope made its appearance, Elliot was inclined to think that the editors had not taken the bother to see what he had written.

This latest story he considered to be the best work he had ever done. It had taken him hours to figure a scheme which he decided was feasible —one which would, at least, bring some acknowledgment of his work.

He would offer this, free of cost, other than an unbiased and impartial criticism from the editor.

That surely "would make 'em sit up and take notice."

Confident that he had found a novel method to attract attention, he mailed his manuscript, and then sat back and waited. Each day it was gone he could not refrain from boasting of the value he supposed it to be worth.

Once more the period of hope deferred rolled round, and as usual, the unmistakable package was returned. One thing it contained, was different to that upon similar occasions. This was a letter from the editor.

"In all justice to ourselves," so this ran, "we could not accept this story, had you offered us a bonus for printing it. Your style shows you are of the newspaper school. Yours is a direct narrative, well told, though utterly valueless from our viewpoint."

He had builded such high hopes of success, that it was hard to be told the truth. For a moment, he was tempted to throw the bundle in the wastepaper basket. This, though, was the child of his brain and he found it hard to part with it abruptly.

Rather, he would carry it home for a last reading, to see for himself wherein he had erred.

Late that night, as he trudged down the ill-lit suburban street, his thoughts were filled with rancor against the heartless literary fate which seemed to pursue him.

As he was passing a particularly gloomy spot, it was the surprise of his

life to hear a hoarse, "Hands up," from the deepened shadows.

More dangerous still, was a something—round in shape, and "big round as a tomato can," thought Elliot—which was pressed close to his gastronomic region.

In another moment, practiced fingers were threading in and out of his pockets. A short fat man and a long thin robber, were making fast work in their search for booty. His inside pocket, wherein was hidden the rejected short story, was the last to be explored. This they seized upon as though it were the prize for which they had been searching.

"Don't look back until you have gone a hundred yards," one of them said, and then they were off.

"Shorty" Elliot didn't look back until he had the front door of his home unlocked, then it was only to assure himself that they were not at his heels.

The highwaymen were not so hasty. Under the first electric light, they paused to examine their plunder.

"Hell!" said the lean man after one glance, and made as if to throw the manuscript into a clump of brush.

"Nix!" said the rotund one, as he made a grab for it. "It has been my observation that we, in our profession, overlook chances for further gain by our failure to study detail."

"As a high-browed yeggman, you sure are the limit," said he of the spindle shanks, as he watched his companion pocket the papers.

Later in the night, the two further examined the plunder in the "flop-house" where they made headquarters. The short man, after scanning the first page, smothered a "Well! Well!"

"What's eatin' you, Jim?" the other asked.

"It looks as though this boob was making a confession and was blamed fool enough to put it down in writing!"

Now, the introduction which Elliot had written to his short story was being absorbed with an avidity that would have warmed the cockles of his heart.

In it he had unconsciously pictured scene after scene in the little town where he was born and raised.

"The one bank in Wayville," so he had written in opening his subject, "stands well back from the straggling main street of the town. It is a building of distinctive lines and is admired by every visitor. No one but the writer knows that it contains a secret—one which jeopardizes every dollar in its vaults. Yet this secret is of no value to the possessor."

Here the long-limbed crook interrupted.

"Where did he say Wayville was?" he asked.

"He doesn't say."

"That's Wayville, Indianer, I'll bet you!"

"Well, listen to this."

Then followed an elaborate description of the bank building and its construction. Rapidly the little man read the story—a tale of a metal-worker's assistant who had been ordered to place a steel grating in an air shaft. How he had substituted a wooden contrivance, painted to resemble the steel safeguard. How he had resolved to return some day and take advantage of his guilty knowledge, and, in

the end, a fair-haired wife was a guiding star to the path of rectitude and honesty.

When the reader finished, the two sat several moments in silence. The lean one was the first to speak.

"A wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse," quoth he.

"You display almost human intelligence," the other answered.

A couple of hours later, two rather unkempt men stowed away in a freight car, outbound and headed in the direction of Wayville.

And it was just about that time a letter arrived for Elliot which threw him in the seventh Hades of perturbation. His first reading of it electrified him. He had to ponder through it a second time before its full purport seeped into his brain.

"Dear Sir," it ran. "We must humbly beg your pardon for the return of your manuscript. Stenographers are only human and will make mistakes. We will be only too pleased to have you return it and will accept it at the usual rate of ten cents a word."

What he had parted with the night before without a word or a struggle, was now a thing of wealth beyond even his fondest hopes. That livelong day, "Shorty" Elliot cursed his fate.

All day long, two yeggmen slept by snatches in a box car on a Wayville siding, waiting and watching for night to come.

About midnight, they crept from their hiding place, and guided by the rangy one, they made their way to the main street of the town.

They saw the night watchman pass the bank building, then scurried to where the fire escape hung invitingly to the ground. Two forms, one fat and one thin, were up this ladder and a-top the roof in almost the wink of an eye.

There stood the ventilator shaft as had been described. As had been mapped out, down it the lean one went while his companion stood guard.

Several minutes passed.

"Hist!" It was a call from the shaft. The "lookout" hurried over.

"That guy gave us a bum steer," came the whisper from below. "This grating is made of the best bank steel and it would take a blast of dynamite and electric drills to even jar it," said the thin one in a disappointed tone.

"Come up," the other whispered back. "Let's get while the gettin's good."

The blind baggage of the 3 A.M. passenger train out of Wayville carried aboard two utterly disgusted highwaymen. For a long time both sat immobile and mused.

"I'd like to meet that guy again," said the gaunt one; "I'd bop him on the bean."

"My meditations were in the same channel," the other answered. For some minutes he sat silent, as the rain of cinders beat a tattoo on the hood of the coach. Then he said in a harsh voice:

"Presuming that the gentleman is so employed as to be found in the same locality at the same time that we found him there before, I would be willing to pay him my compliments."

"Jimmie, you may be a highbrow,

but you can count me in on it," said the lean man.

In the "flop-house" they slept all day. Little did they know that "Shorty" Elliot was searching high up and low down for a little fat man and a long lean one, with criminal tendencies.

That night their time was unoccupied. Many times the long-legged crook raspingly declared that nothing would stop him "from beatin' that guy up."

In the same spot, at the same hour, where and when Elliot had been waylaid two nights previous, they lay in wait in the shadows. Soon the squatty form of "Shorty" came lurching along. He was at odds with the world and walked dejectedly.

This time he looked askance at the spot. A muttered command raised both his hopes and his fears. This growl had a familiar ring, and as the two forms came closer, Elliot could have hugged them round the neck.

"Slug him, Jim!" This brought him back to earth.

"No, boys, no," pleaded "Shorty," with a feigned show of familiarity. "You fellows have another guess coming. I want to give you the easiest piece of change you ever got in your life."

"Show us!" It was almost in chorus.

"Give me back the bundle of papers you took from me, and I'll give you fifty dollars."

"A bargain 's a bargain," said the smaller man, as he fumbled in his pockets.

"That is," Lawson stumbled on eagerly, "that is, I can't, right this minute, but I will if you'll tell me where I can meet you tomorrow."

"No shenanigan with the cops," from the lean one.

"No sickin' the fly bulls on us," from the short yegg.

"Honest, no!" was Elliot's piteous declaration.

"Then meet us in Snake Oil Pete's place on Water Street at two o'clock," the lean robber said.

It took a world of energy, persuasion and a strong pull at the strings of several friendships to rake the fifty dollars together, but "Shorty" did.

After he met the two and had concluded the bargain, he wore the smile that wouldn't melt.

He would have fought now to his last gasp for his scribblings, so it was little wonder that he took the precaution to forward it under registered mail.

Four days elapsed, four days of heavenly bliss in anticipation of the things he would buy and what he would do with the earnings of his writing. Then came a shock.

It was the familiar bulky package. No one, thought he, in these days of simplified commerce, would send such a package of bank notes, if such they were.

Quickly he ripped open the envelope and his worst fears were realized. A letter of explanation accompanied his manuscript.

"We have discharged our chuckle-headed stenographer," it stated. "She has been guilty of another serious blunder. The letter she sent you ask-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 60)

The Shadow on the Wall

BY GEORGIA ROBERTS DURSTON

Here is a thrilling, dramatic story, with an Edgar Allen Poe touch, of a lonely toll house, mysterious and murder-smirched.

TANCH, faithful, and willing though he was, the doctor's horse stopped under the hood of the old tollhouse, and refused to venture farther in the dense blackness and wild uproar of the storm.

"Thank God, I am on my way home!" breathed the doctor, as he remembered the condition of the patient whom he had just left, and rejoiced to think that his visit had taken the malady just in time.

Pushing aside the oilskins and robes and carefully placing on the seat of the buggy, a small object he had held in his lap, the doctor led the way into the barn, which stood near the tollhouse, and, by the light of his pocket flash, blanketed the exhausted horse. Then, taking up the small object again, and fishing a lantern from under the seat, he struggled to the door of the tollhouse and tried the knob.

It was unfastened and the doctor entered. He lighted the lantern, and, as the flame steadied, the object cuddled under his arm proved to be a tiny bulldog, which leaped to the floor, and with mischievous curiosity began a close scrutiny of the premises. Housed, and safe from the blasts of wind that screamed about the old stone building, the little animal paid no attention to the raging storm, but pried into musty corners and dodged behind and under the scattered pieces of decrepit furniture.

The doctor placed the lantern on a table and sat down, after gingerly trying the chair. As he filled his pipe and lighted it, he recalled his last visit to the tollhouse. Across the room there was still a stain on the worn flooring. He remembered the sudden summons and the wild-eyed boy who had come clattering on horseback to bring the news. A hurried drive had brought him quickly to the place; but One unseen, mysterious, inevitable, followed at his elbow. It was Death; and the ghastly creature with cut throat, who had summoned him, had scarcely time to address a dozen struggling, bubbling words to the doctor, who knelt close to hear them.

Old John Dirk, dying by his own hand, had turned to the doctor and spoken useless words.

"Mary—Mary—" he gasped.

He struggled as the grim invisible hand he had summoned, fell on his heart. "Doctor—I put—"

The doctor remembered hearing some one whisper, "He wanted to tell where his wife's money is." At any rate, not a penny had been found; and Charity buried the muti-

lated clay of old John Dirk.

Mary Dirk's money—a pitiful sum inherited from a miserly father—was the subject of endless quarrels between man and wife. Not one cent would Mary spend or give. Her frail little body stood unshaken before blood-curdling threats of violence; her stubborn will leaped nimbly to meet every trick and turn of which sly old John was capable.

The Dirks had lived in the toll-house for years. After the road over which it leaned had been abandoned, they remained until the drowning of old Mary Dirk in Green Lake, the pond just behind the house. This dark, sly, silent sheet of water was said to be bottomless. At all events, Mary Dirk's weazened little body was never seen after the evening when she started across to get a mess of wild blackberries growing on the opposite bank. The overturned boat and her old sunbonnet limply floating, had startled John Dirk into hoarse cries for help; but Green Lake refused to respond to the feverish dragging and blasting that disturbed the dark surface. Soon after, somebody's barn burned down, or a thoroughbred cow died, and Mary Dirk was forgotten.

John, who owed the doctor ninety cents, came and paid him seventy-five of it and said good-by. He was going away. He could not stay in the old place alone, he said. So he, too, disappeared.

Another family took the house and left it in a panic, swearing that it was haunted. After that, it stood idle, growing more and more ominous and sinister in its isolation and decay. At the end of five years, John Dirk, silent and dark as ever, appeared in town, and drifting back to the old stone house, he had lived there, apparently feeding on his loneliness until the day when he had cut his throat and died with the secret of Mary Dirk's money still on him.

The doctor knocked the ashes from his pipe and turned to watch the dog, which was acting strangely. He stood stiff-legged and bristling, his eyes fixed upon the rickety door. As a fierce blast shook it, it slowly sagged open a foot and stuck against the warped flooring. The doctor rose and closed it; but the dog paid no attention to him. He glared fixedly at space, shaking violently. The doctor seated himself again and spoke his name. Never had he seen such abject terror in a living thing.

"Gruff, come here," he commanded.

The dog's eyes slowly traveled along the dingy wall; then, his legs doubling weakly under him and still with fixed gaze, he began slowly to back toward his master. He moved stealthily, as though he expected to be seized. Slowly, slowly, he stepped, until he felt the doctor's hand upon him; then he sprawled and scrambled into his lap, pressing close against him. But he could not gain refuge even there. He found his voice; and, screaming, leaped to the door and flung himself upon it, scratching and digging madly. Flecks of foam were on his bare teeth. The doctor, dumb with amazement, opened the door.

At that moment, the wind suddenly stopped blowing, and the clamor

and din of the storm was succeeded by absolute calm and silence. As the dog shot out into the pitchy darkness, the doctor listened to his receding cries as he dashed away in the direction of the distant village. "Well, certainly that is the limit," mused the doctor, as he started for his lantern.

Before he reached it, something arrested him. He, too, felt a chill of cold, unspeakable horror pervade him, and he fixed his eyes, as Gruff had, on the opposite wall. As he stared, he saw a shadow move along its dingy surface. Slowly, very slowly, it passed. He managed to reach the lantern, and with a shaking hand, lifted it from the table and set it on the floor beside him; but the changing of the light made no difference in the appearance of the bending, wavering shadow.

Now, a sort of paralysis seized him; he remained motionless, half stooping. The room was large, and across its length, crept the phantom, which, as he stared unwinkingly at it, assumed outlines ominous and familiar. The doctor's hair crept upon his scalp; deadly nausea overwhelmed him as the shadow moved on, one hand outstretched as though pointing.

At last, he knew: it was John Dirk!

Then, as the doctor stood helpless in the grip of cold horror of which he had never dreamed, the breathless stillness was broken by a crash of thunder which seemed to shake the very earth; and with it came a blinding glare of green light which, for a long, aching instant, filled the room.

When the doctor opened his eyes, dawn, gray and sodden, dimly illuminated the wrecked house. The doctor lay full length on the floor. He was unharmed, but badly shocked, and he pulled himself to his feet with difficulty. He looked about. The table on which the lantern had first stood was in splinters.

As his eyes accustomed themselves to the half light, he saw that the opposite wall was shattered. A heap of broken stone and plaster lay at the base, and sprawled on the heap was a pile of something—rags, perhaps, that looked curiously like a bent and distorted figure. As the doctor approached it, he felt again the cold horror chill him.

Shaking it off, he stooped.

Day was breaking and a dazzling flood of light filled the room.

The doctor stared. Released from the old bricked-in fireplace, lay all that was left of Mary Dirk!

The look of mutinous silence that must have galled and goaded John Dirk, as she watched the endless search for her money, was still plain on her parchment features.

Her pipe-stem throat was cut from ear to ear.

Joe Grummitt's Ghost

BY H. P. HOLT

This has to do with the unfinished confession of a dying sailor whose mate carried the news of his death to his wife. The mate learned the nature of the confession, sprinting from the business-end of a broom handle in the hands of the supposed widow.

JOE GRUMMITT'S soul passed away as the windjammer Moonbeam slid over the oily seas of the Bay of Biscay, headed for England, and his mortal remains were wrapped up in a piece of old sail, together with two heavy pieces of coal.

No tears were mingled with the salt water as the package sank, for nobody had any particularly happy or tender recollections of Joe. His most prominent characteristics had been an inordinate love of avoiding work and encountering rum. The rum was his own affair, but the work was not, for somebody had to do it; and when Joe, with the subtle skill of the lazy old shellback, dodged duty, it resulted in others having to shoulder it.

Not even a sigh went up to Heaven as the sail and coal and Joe went down into half a mile of blue water. The general impression seemed to be that it was a pity the obsequies could not have been conducted earlier on the voyage even, if necessary, without Joe's accommodating the ship's company by dying.

The late, but not apparently lamented Mr. Grummitt, was one of those curious-looking individuals whose age it is almost impossible to guess within a score of years. One never quite knew how much his appearance was due to age and how much to rum.

Ever since Joe's spirit had drifted in its appointed direction after his earthly form had finished with it, Tam Evans, the carpenter, had preserved a moody silence. By common consent, he had been appointed sick-nurse to the dying man, and he was alone with Joe at the finish. Tam slept badly the following night, and the day afterward he buttonholed the bo'sun in a quiet corner.

"You've been married twice, Curly, haven't you?" he began.

The bo'sun eyed him in a way that was not pointedly friendly. Curly had certainly led two women to the altar, but he did not like to be reminded of the fact.

"An' if I have?" he asked, with some suspicion.

"Well, it kinda makes you an authority on the subject of the gentler sex," observed Tam thoughtfully, pulling at his pipe.

Curly sniffed.

"It's about old Joe," Tam went on, "and his widder."

"Jam your helm hard over, Tam, when you know there's a widder

"Maybe," insisted Tam, looking about," commented the bo'sun.

round cautiously, "but there's a secret confession," he added in subdued tones.

"How do you mean?" asked Curly.

"I haven't got hold of it rightly," the other went on. "You see, Joe knew his lights were going out, and when a man knows that, he likes to clear up things a bit, 'specially if he hasn't quite earned his halo before making the long journey. An' I reckon Joe Grummitt will have to start all over afresh earning his halo now. Anyway, just before the end, he called me over and asked me to pour him out a little drop of rum to give him strength to make a confession. I gave him a drain.

"'Tam,' he said, so low I could only just hear, 'will you go to Turner's Row, in Limehouse, and give a message to Mrs. Grummitt there, for me?'

"'It's a confession,' he went on. 'Tell her—' muttering something about 'wife,' and I poured a few drops of rum into his mouth to revive him, as I was just getting interested, but he never spoke again."

"Well?" remarked the bo'sun.

"It seems to me," added the carpenter, "that either you or me ought to go and tell Mrs. Grummitt. Of course we can't tell her what the confession was, because he didn't make it properly, but she ought to be told she's a widder, and it might make her happy to know he tried to make a confession."

"Yes, perhaps you're right," agreed Curly. "I don't see it will do any harm if you tell her that much."

"I was thinking," Tam observed slowly, as he polished the bowl of a pipe on his palm, "that as you'd been married twice and understood the sex, p'raps you'd be the best to do it."

There was a sudden stiffening in Curly's back.

"No, that's where you're wrong," he said, with some uneasiness. "I don't mind coming to sea in a rotten old tub like this and taking all the chances of wind and weather that there may be knocking around, but I draw the line at breaking news to women that they've dropped back into the matrimonial market."

"Somebody ought to tackle the job," protested the carpenter.

"Maybe. Anyway, you can cross my name out," retorted Curly. "I've done my bit of duty in that direction and I reckon I'm exempt for the rest of my natural life. It's the best part of ten years ago now, but I haven't forgotten any of it. I'd met an old shipmate, a man I hadn't seen for a long time. He wouldn't have seen me then, as he owed me five shillings, but I just clapped him on the back and we drifted into a bar to talk over old times. He said he had promised to be home for dinner and couldn't stop, but we had another drink. He parted with that five shillings about tea time and as soon as he got out into the street, he fell under a wagon, which left nothing of him worth mentioning. I knew his wife, and I felt it was my duty to tell her what had happened, so I went to his home. She was watching at the door for him, and as I was handling a delicate task, I walked straight into the house.

"'That's an appetizing smell of steak and onions,' I said, looking at a

pot on the side of the fire. She didn't seem much inclined for conversation, with me, at any rate, but I had to lead up to the main point somehow.

"'A good cook like you ought to find it easy enough to get another husband, Mrs. Pidsley,' I went on.

"She looked at me, still without speaking. She knew all my cards weren't out yet. Women are mighty quick that way. So I went on breaking it gently.

"'P'raps you'd like to put on a bit of black and walk round to the mortuary with me,' I said.

"'What for?' she asked, quick-like, in a way that ought to have put me on my guard.

"'To see Jim's body,' I replied.

"Suddenly, she got up on her hind legs and her voice wasn't so quiet.

"Do you mean that my Jim is dead?' she asked.

"I nodded, meaning to be sympathetic. She flopped down on the floor and began to laugh and cry, all at once, and then she got up and started to throw things at me. I stood it for a bit, dodging the crockery, but when she got hold of the pan full of steak and onions, I slipped my cable and made straight down the street under a full head of steam. No, it's no soft job being the bearer of bad tidings, women's logic is so funny. she would have sent me to join Jim Pidsley if I hadn't been quick. I'm not going to face the danger the second time."

The carpenter was disappointed, but he was no coward. He clawed his scanty locks in a puzzled fashion for a few minutes.

"But the cases aren't the same," he said at length. "There's nobody for me to ask Mrs. Grummitt to view, so I can't begin that way."

"The great thing," observed the bo'sun sententiously, "is to exercise tact. Do it gently. You've got to remember her feelings. Women don't lose their husbands every day, so you must lead up to it in easy steps."

"How, for instance?" queried the anxious carpenter.

"You've never met the lady, I presume?"

"Never heard of her until Joe mentioned the subject near his finish."

"Well, you might go to Turner's Row and find out where she lives. After that, your diplomacy comes in. You ought to wear a black tie out of respect for her feelings. Introduce yourself as a shipmate of his and begin by mentioning that he isn't as well as he was, but say that he never entertained any unkindly memories of home. You can go on saying how he used to talk by the hour when you were together on the Moonbeam, thousands of miles from Limehouse, about his beautiful bride and how he loved her. That's the way to get on the tender side of her at first. P'raps she'll shed a tear or two, and you can take the next step by mentioning that he did have a trifling accident, through the mast falling on him. If she takes that without screaming, you want to add that the skipper had to amputate both legs, as they were a bit crushed, but he bore up well and was murmuring her name as he came round afterward. By then, you've got the ground-work laid for what's coming. If she's still reasonable, tell

her his arms were affected and that they had to come off, too, and his only regret was that he wouldn't be able to walk about with his arm round Mrs. Grummitt's waist, as he always used to do when he got home. You'll have no further trouble after that, 'cos you'll only have to wait for a suitable moment to add that he pined away worrying about it for her sake, and he was buried at sea like a hero."

"It sounds simple enough, the way you put it," commented the carpenter. "After all, I haven't killed Joe and there's nothing to fear. I wish he'd lived a bit longer so that he could have told me more about that confession. She's sure to be interested in that. It's the sort of tack a woman likes—something to cry over when she's miserable and something to tell a neighbor about when she gets confidential."

Tam Evans turned the matter over and over in his mind during the rest of the voyage, until he thought his brain was on the verge of bursting.

"It's more a job for one of those solicitor chaps," he muttered to himself, "only you can't break a promise made to a dying man."

The day after the Moonbeam was safely tied up and Tam was free, he turned out his slop chest and arrayed himself in all the glory of his best suit. He called it his best because he had nothing better. It did not take him long to discover Turner's Row, and taking his courage in both hands, he went boldly forward.

Although he had prepared a most tactful way of leading up to his grim message on the way, the words slipped from his memory as he stood before the door.

"Mrs. Grummitt?" he asked, with a catch in his breath, as a woman answered his timid knock.

"Yes," she answered, with an inquiring look.

"It's about your husband, Joe Grummitt," said the carpenter, feeling hot and uncomfortable, although it was a cool day.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, looking him through and through. "P'raps you'll come indoors."

She sat bolt upright by the side of a wash tub and Tam Evans subsided weakly into a chair. At that moment, especially when he considered the way she regarded him, he felt his burden almost greater than he could bear.

"And what about him? Is he in trouble?" she asked, her lips pressed rather too tightly together.

"Yes—er, or rather, no," began the carpenter, in a frenzy of nervousness. "You p'raps didn't know he'd given up the drink."

"The news had not reached me," Mrs. Grummitt replied in frigid tones.

"It's a fact," said Tam. "And besides that, he's never going to drink again."

"He said that when we were first married—several times," observed Mrs. Grummitt icily.

"But it's the truth this time," announced Tam, with an unmistakable air of sincerity.

"Is—is he in prison?" This solution of the problem flashed across Mrs. Grummitt's mind at once.

"No; but he'll never drink again—not even water," and the carpenter put a note of sadness into his voice.

He watched her face carefully, on the lookout for signs of a storm.

The lady, however, remained peculiarly peaceful.

"It sounds as though he was dead," she declared. "Is he?"

"I ministered to his wants up to the finish," said the carpenter, immensely relieved by the brave way in which she was taking it.

"Can you give me proof?" Mrs. Grummitt asked, with something suspiciously like eagerness in her manner.

Tam produced a certificate drawn up by the captain.

"Well, I never wished anyone dead in my life," she said, "but now this has happened, I s'pose there is no harm in me saying how thankful I am, Mr.— er——"

"Evans, ma'am, at your service."

"You see, Mr. Evans," she explained, "Joe Grummitt had his faults, as perhaps you know, as you have sailed with him. I've kept the home going, with taking in washing, for twenty years, and he wouldn't even go to sea until I had no money left. I don't know where he's gone to, but I hope they won't have more trouble with him than I've had."

The carpenter, feeling several years younger since his task had proved so easy, admitted that the late Joe had had his peculiarities; and then he went into details concerning the death scene and Joe's mysterious reference to a confession. Much to Tam's surprise, Mrs. Grummitt was not particularly interested.

"I don't suppose, knowing my late husband as well as I do, that it was anything to his credit, so, perhaps, it is just as well for his sins to die with him," she observed.

Tam stayed to tea, and Mrs. Grummitt made him feel at home in her back parlor.

"She's a sensible, homely sort of a woman, and I'm glad for her sake that that skulking brute had to be dropped over the side when he was," he thought.

He made some sort of effort to reduce his straggling hair to order and noted the fact that Joe's relict could not be much over forty.

Considering the gravity of the mission on which Tam had visited Turner's Row, he and Mrs. Grummitt spent a comparatively pleasant hour or two together.

"P'raps you'll look in to tea again, Mr. Evans?" she said, as he was going.

"Thank you," he replied. "I sha'n't be going to sea again for a week or two. To tell you the truth, I mean to make this next trip my last. I've worked hard and saved a few pounds, and there's a certain little country inn I've got my eye on. I hope I shall be skipper there when I come back from sea the next time."

The carpenter, who had often admitted to himself that a bachelor's life was a lonely one, frequently thought of Mrs. Grummitt during the next day or two.

"A good, hard-working woman, who's had misfortune in her first choice of a husband," he reflected; and with considerable satisfaction, he pictured her as hostess at the little inn. He sighed, and it was not a sigh of sorrow, as he donned the best suit a couple of days later and bent his

steps in the direction of Limehouse.

Mrs. Grummitt greeted him affably enough. Perhaps she had some inkling of Tam's intentions. At any rate, she allowed him to hold her hand longer than was necessary and returned the gentle pressure he gave it. After that, Tam made a point of calling on the widow every day on some pretext or other. A couple of weeks drifted on sweetly enough and the carpenter began to feel some of youth's romance coursing through his veins again. Mrs. Grummitt seemed different from other women. There was a gentleness about her that appealed to him greatly. He could not imagine her saying anything angry; he decided that she was the sweetest tempered woman he had ever encountered, and the day the ship sailed, his mind was made up. He would ask Mrs. Grummitt to share such joys and sorrows as were left to him in this life. As soon as he returned from the voyage (without spending a penny of his salary), they would have the wedding knot tied and spend the rest of their days comfortably at the country inn.

He left his solitary lodgings in all the gay attire of the would-be bridegroom. There was nearly a pennyworth of oil on his hair and a vivid button-hole, built on a large scale, adorned his coat.

As he drew near Turner's Row, little tinges of nervousness assailed him now and again. He had seen something in Mrs. Grummitt's manner which indicated that he would not plead his cause in vain, but what lover ever started on a proposing expedition without feeling some little fluttering at his heart?

"I think that just one drop of whisky would nerve me for the fray," he muttered to himself; and though he little suspected it then, he changed his whole future by stepping into the bar parlor of the Jolly Sailors.

There was only one other person there, a gentleman with a strikingly colored nose and somewhat unsteady legs. He was also inclined to be garrulous. At first, the amorous carpenter paid little attention to him, but the stranger absorbed a considerable quantity of gin and he was simply longing to open his heart to someone.

"A man o' mystery, I am," he said confidentially, leaning over toward Tam. "I'm only a sea-going person, but I could write a book about my life."

He paused a moment to reflect on the impressiveness of that statement. Tam Evans, who had a benevolent appearance, nodded absently, his mind being fixed on a certain conversation in which he would shortly be engaged, and the stranger took it for a sign of encouragement.

"Yes," he went on, "I'm what those writin' chaps call a human enigma. I'm not what I seem to be," he concluded darkly.

His statement caught the carpenter's ear and he cast a glance of interest at the enigma.

"Sorry to hear that," he observed casually.

"I'm not," went on the enigma. "It's the best day's work I ever did. I'm lost—lost to the world, as though I'd never been born."

The lost soul put two pence on the counter and had his glass refilled,

while he allowed his statement to take root.

"Why don't you ask the police to help you to find yourself?" suggested the carpenter.

"Because I don't want to be found, see?" replied the enigma. "It took me a long time to get lost and it cost me a bit of money, and I only hope I never run across her again."

The mention of a lady added interest to the conversation and Tam nodded sympathetically. The human enigma had distinctly imbibed as much as was good for him, and though the gin was making his tongue wag, he had his glass refilled.

"When your old woman begins to use physical violence," he said, moving a little closer and speaking in a subdued voice, "it's about time to clear out, eh?"

"It's very awkward," remarked Tam.

"Aye, and I cleared." The stranger began to chuckle at the recollection. "An old pal, a sea-going man like myself, told me his 'eart was bad and the doctor had warned him he couldn't live more 'n a few weeks. He was going to sea and I reckoned it was fairly long odds he wouldn't come back. So I gave him a sovereign and he signed on in my name, on a windjammer bound for Australia. And he turned up his toes during the voyage. I've even seen the death certificate—my own death certificate—which proves that Joe Grummitt doesn't exist."

The carpenter dropped his glass.

"Are you—" he began, but he could not bring himself to complete the question. The enigma was sitting unsteadily, with one eye closed so that he could obtain a properly focussed view of the world.

Throughout his career, Tam Evans had earned the reputation of having a great sense of duty. Clearly, he had a duty to perform here—a duty to himself and to the supposed relict of the supposedly dead sailor. Fortunately, the human enigma was not in a condition to protest much against anything.

"If you'll just call a cab," said the carpenter to the barman, "I'll see our friend here, home."

The enigma was still talking when he was bundled into the vehicle.

"Turner's Row. It's between the Crown and Anchor and that big pawnshop," he whispered; and Tam Evans was filled with a strange assortment of emotions during the ride.

The enigma made no protest when the carpenter led him from the cab. Tam did not trouble about knocking, but walked straight in. The relict, with one eye on the probability of a coming proposal, had taken her satin frock from the drawer, an occasion that only happened on great festival days, and she looked up with an amiable smile when the door opened.

Tam Evans entered, supporting the insecure form of the enigma, who seemed to shrink visibly when the eyes of the relict fell on him.

"I brought this along, ma'am, in consequence of a statement I heard it make. I only want your assurance you have never seen it before," said the carpenter.

A subtle change had come over Mrs. Grummitt. The amiable smile

vanished. She stood up and thrust her head forward, at the same time reaching out for a broom.

"You beast!" she exclaimed, gripping the broom with both hands. Her remark was addressed to the human enigma.

The shock of being faced by his lawful spouse partly sobered him. Suddenly, the broom descended with a crack, on the enigma's cranium and then rose again. As though hypnotized by the sight of the woman, Tam stood rooted to the ground for a moment and then backed toward the door hastily, as the broom came down for the second time with a crash.

In two seconds, the carpenter was making a bee-line for his ship.

"You look as though you'd seen a ghost," said Curly, as he crept on board.

Tam looked hard at him in a dazed sort of way and for a moment it seemed as though he were going to speak. Then he slipped quietly down the companion.

"I reely believe he has," said Curly to himself, as he watched the carpenter disappear.

It

BY LEONARD WOOD, JR.

A very interesting story of the Philippines, of two soldiers—one a leper—both of whom married the same girl.

ANN DRISCOL stood in the bow of the little army transport, Liscum, watching the tiny town of Panglima on Mindanao grow larger and larger as the ship approached it. To her, the town looked like so many nipa and bamboo shacks, built up out of the water on poles, except for a few dark green, red-roofed bungalows. These were on the farther side of the town, and she presumed them to be the quarters in the army post. In the rear of the village, rose lofty, jungle-clad hills. Certainly Panglima did not seem to offer a very alluring place for a bride to spend the first years of her married life.

Ann had no sooner married Captain Albert Driscol than his regiment was ordered to the Philippines. She had never hoped to visit the Islands, especially the island of Mindanao, for it had been here, that five years previous, her first husband, Lieutenant Richard Berry, had been killed in a fight with the Moros. His body, like those of many others, had never been found. Ann was not in the islands when the disaster occurred. Her husband was to have sent for her later, when Moro Land became more peaceful. So it was but natural that the scenery and the realization of where she was, forced unpleasant thoughts into her mind.

"If I can feel the way I do today about Dick," she murmured to herself, "I—I don't think I should have married Albert—it wasn't fair to him."

She had known Albert Driscol since she was a young girl. They had been school-day sweethearts. Later, when he was at West Point, she had been "dragged" by him to several of the hops. When he graduated he was sent to Alaska, and for four years they did not see each other. It was during this time that Ann met Berry. From the start, he appealed to her in a different way than Driscol had, and it wasn't long before they married. Then five years later, after Berry's death, when Driscol asked her to marry him, she had accepted without hesitation, for she felt that she would be under the protection of a man who had for her the combined qualities of a brother and a dear and tried friend.

"Ann, dear, why not come up on deck with the other passengers?" It was her husband who spoke. The sound of his voice clashed noisily for a moment with her thoughts.

"Why, I like it better down here," she tried to smile. "I love to watch the water play around the bow."

He noticed a tear resting on one of

her long, black eyelashes—those exquisite, languorous eyelashes which shadowed Spanish eyes. "I hope," he began awkwardly, "that you are not letting yourself think of—"

"Albert, *please!*" she begged, unable to bear hearing him utter what had been in her mind of late and gnawing at her soul. The surroundings were having a most unpleasant psychological affect on her.

"Remember, dear," he spoke kindly, almost weighing each word, "when you promised—"

"Oh, don't!" she shuddered, "I know I am not playing fair with you, when I allow thoughts of—*him* to enter my mind." She paused a moment and swept a hand toward the white-beached, volcanic land. "But look—look where we are!"

"I was a brute to have brought you here!" exclaimed her husband.

"No, you weren't, Albert," she assured him, taking affectionately one of his hands. "Do you think that I would have stayed behind *this* time?"

He did not answer her but, slipping her arm into his, led her up on deck. Here, in the cheery company of the wives of some of the officers of the three infantry companies to be stationed at Panglima, unpleasant memories soon fled from her.

It was an hour later, and ten o'clock in the morning, when the Liscum docked at the town's rickety little pier. Immediately, sleepy, tropical Panglima awoke with a start. Three companies of the eighteenth infantry had to be aboard by that evening, in order to make room on shore for the newcomers. Consequently, there began much unloading; and from the pier there arose a babble of different tongues, for it was thronged with Moros, soldiers, Filipinos, and one or two civilians, clad in immaculate white duck.

Ann was quite excited over it all. She found the town far from attractive with its nipa shacks and dusty, filthy streets, filled with half-naked children, pigs and chickens. But the garrison, with its trim parade ground, around which were the guard house, the soldiers' quarters and the officers' bungalows, quite appealed to her. She found their little home-to-be cosy and attractive; in front of the house there was a huge betelnut tree, but in the rear, was a beautiful sandy beach. But in spite of certain pleasant features, the whole place had a barren appearance. The sun seemed to scorch everything relentlessly. Even the blue, shimmering sea seemed coated with sunshine, which dazzled Ann unpleasantly.

By five o'clock that evening, she was very tired from the hard day she had spent. In spite of her endeavors and those of her Filipino *muchacho* and Chinese cook to get the house in order, it was strewn with trunks, half-unpacked boxes, wood shavings, and uncomfortable-looking, mosquito-netted army beds in their wrong places.

Disgusted with the condition of her new home, she strolled out on the beach. It was quite delightful outdoors now, as the sun was setting, and a delicious, velvet breeze was blowing. She noticed the Liscum slowly edging away from the dock, and at that moment she heard a loud cheer arise from the men on board. They were going home—back to the States!—

via Manila, after three long years in Panglima; and already she felt that she could appreciate their joy.

But within a month, Ann was becoming thoroughly acclimated. The heat no longer bothered her much, in fact not so much as it did her husband; but then, he was light and she dark. Thoughts of the past now seldom forced their unwelcome way into her mind. She was beginning to feel for Albert something more than the love of a sister or a good friend. She had always felt sure this would come in time, for she had no faith in platonic love in any of its forms between two people of opposite sexes. Time did not hang heavily on her hands, for in the cool of early morning there was tennis or riding, and in the late afternoon, the best bathing she had ever experienced. She was beginning to really enjoy life here, when fear intruded upon this happiness.

A number of mysterious robberies had been committed recently in the town of Panglima. The latter being a small place, excitement of any sort spread rapidly, and in spreading, developed with equal rapidity. Whether the robbers, or *ladrones,* were Filipinos or Moros was not known. The local *policia* were instructed to show their value to the community by capturing the *ladrones,* it being too petty an affair for the regulars. One night, a theft occurred in the post. The robbers were very daring to risk themselves within the carefully paroled boundaries of the garrison; and the realization of this made Panglima buzz. But the climax of enduring these thefts with only *policia* to stop them came when, one night, two masked Filipinos held up a *Chino* store.

On the following day, Major Watts, the commandant of the post, (it was too small for a colonel), gave orders for the soldiers to go after the *ladrones* that afternoon. And Captain Driscol's company was chosen for the skirmish. This news filled Ann with an almost unconquerable fear for her husband's safety. Again she was experiencing the anxiety which a soldier's wife sooner or later invariably undergoes. But like a soldier's wife she kept her fear to herself.

Fortunately, or at least, so Ann considered it, the news that the Moros forty miles down the coast, had sacked a Filipino village, was the cause which immediately demanded the garrison's attention instead of the *ladrones.* Therefore, Major Watts recalled his order to Captain Driscoll, and here is where the fortunate part of it all came in: leaving him in charge of the post, he himself set out after the Moros, with two of the companies. Ann felt that her husband had been spared from death.

The *ladrones* must have heard news of their impending danger, and fled back into the hills immediately upon receiving it, or decided to let things cool off a bit in Panglima, because for two weeks the town rested peacefully. But the times were not quiet. News was constantly being received of the encounters Major Watts was having with the Moros. Men were being killed, and the thought of this drove Ann back into her old mood. She realized that these poor men who were killed might have wives back in the

States—barely more than brides, whose lives were wrapped up in their love for their husbands.

One day, news came to Panglima that the Moros had killed eleven men, and wounded eighteen. Driscol tried to keep Ann from hearing it, but within two hours, she knew most of the particulars of the disaster, for bad news has no barriers.

That night Ann could not sleep. She lay awake thinking of the awfulness of war. The direful excitement of the last fortnight had seemed to chill her toward everyone. She felt void of any definite feelings. A cloud of aversion and pity seemed to enwrap her. War, she realized, was inevitable as long as men have backbones. Several times she tried to go to sleep, but unsuccessfully.

How calm and silent the world outside her house seemed. And in other places, she knew, havoc was running rampant. The only sounds which reached her ears were the "trudge-trudge-trudge" of a guard's footsteps, as he passed the house at regular intervals; the noise of the flapping wings of huge bats in the betelnut tree, and the weird "bung-bong-bong, bung-bong-bong," of the tom-toms from the Moro section of Panglima.

Suddenly, an abrupt noise, much nearer at hand, attracted her attention. Her nerves tingled. She listened breathlessly. Several faint noises followed, and it sounded as if someone was moving cautiously in the parlor.

Deciding to inform her husband of her suspicion, she gently lifted the mosquito-netting and climbed out of bed. Only two nights before, she had had him search the house for an intruder, who turned out to be none other than her pet monkey, Jocko, who had broken loose. "Perhaps it is that little rascal again!" she thought, pausing half way across the room and looking toward the slightly open door of the parlor. "I'll take a peek and see," she decided, and tiptoed to the door. She paused a moment to listen. Not a sound. Carefully, she peered through the opening. In the heavens there was a three-quarters moon, which cast fantastic shadows about the room. Into each shadow she looked narrowly, but saw nothing unusual. She longed for electric lights, so that she could flood the room with light. Then she lit the candle by her bed, and with it, went fearlessly into the parlor, quietly calling the monkey by name.

"Quiet! Blow out that candle!" hissed a voice behind her.

With a start, she dropped the candle on the table, the light going out. Fearing she might be shot, she remained both motionless and silent. But, finally, as the stranger did not speak, she quavered in as loud a voice as she dared, hoping to waken her husband:

"What are you doing here?"

"For God's sake, not so loud!" the intruder cried in a low voice.

"I will call for help if you don't leave immediately!"

Ann heard the faint patter of bare feet coming toward her. Trembling, she clutched the table.

"Shut up!" the stranger ordered.

"Who are you?" Then something which swept over her in a blaze of misgiving, made her command:

"Speak!"

"Oh, Lord!" he gasped. "I—I didn't believe it was *you*, Ann, but I had to make sure!"

In one agonizing flash, she recognized the voice. Her body became limp and she fell forward upon the table, and would have slipped like a rag to the floor, if he had not caught her.

"Dick!" she moaned, "Dick!" clenching his sleeve in a death-like grip.

For a moment, Richard Berry was seized with the desire to place her on the table and flee. But he had spoken in the excitement of the moment, and she had recognized *his* voice, and knew he was alive. He would stay for a few minutes and then go; for she must never see him—or rather, *it*.

"Call—call Albert," she softly moaned. "I'm too weak."

"No, Ann; we mustn't call anyone," he entreated.

Gaining a little more control of herself, she tottered to the table, and with head hanging forward, half sat there. He stood motionless, as if paralyzed. Several minutes passed, during which neither spoke, but both grappled mentally with the situation.

"Light the lamp," she pleaded. "I want to see you."

"No!"

"Why?" she interrupted nervously.

"I can't tell you, dearest."

"'Dearest'!" she repeated chokingly. "Oh, Dick," her voice was barely more than a whisper, "they told me—you had been killed. It's all been too dreadful!" But as he was unable to answer, she continued, "You'll—you'll forgive me for what I have innocently done?"

"I am the same as dead," he replied bitterly; "but what have you done?"

"Why—oh, don't make me say it," she sobbed.

Almost instantly, he demanded: "Who is Albert?" But as she did not answer, the truth dawned upon him. "My God, Ann!" he exclaimed.

"But why, Dick, why didn't you let me know you were alive?"

"Because—" he started to explain, but his voice failed him. "I can't tell you. I can't!"

"How thoughtless you were, Dick!"

"Thoughtless!" he repeated in a hurt voice. "If you but knew the battle I had to fight to reach a decision as to what I had best do, you wouldn't accuse me of being thoughtless."

"Oh, I don't mean to accuse you," she said softly, coming over to him. "We're together now and nothing else matters." They were silent for a few moments, during which he gripped her arms passionately. "Dick," her voice quivered, "take me in your arms; I want to be near you!"

"Oh, that I might!" he choked.

"Why, what do you mean?" she asked, bewildered. Then quickly, she questioned: "Dearest, why are you here? You came to *me*, didn't you? Tell me that, Dick! Tell me!"

"I didn't know you were even in the Islands," he forced himself to say the truth. "I love you too much to have come here with the purpose of seeing you; and I love you too much even to—" He didn't finish the sentence; he couldn't! He held her off at arms' length, bathing her face in a

streamlet of moonlight. Her eyes were dilated and she was trembling.

"Kiss me, love, kiss me," she murmured. Then she struggled to get close to his body. She felt the clutch on her arms tighten and she longed for him to crush her against him.

"Ann, this isn't fair to either."

"Dick! Dick!" she spoke deliriously. "We're together, dear, *together!*" Her old love for the first man she had given herself to was breaking forth into flame.

"This must stop," he muttered grimly. "Ann, I'm going!"

"Going!" she echoed in surprise. "No!"

"Yes; because you must never know," he shuddered, and added, about *it.*"

"You shan't go!" she exclaimed; whereupon she hurled herself at him. He seized her fiercely and tried to wrench her from him. But the divine fire burning in her, doubled her strength, and she clung to him like a half-mad creature. "Albert!" she cried, "Albert!"

"Ann! Ann! for your own good, let me go!" pleaded Berry.

"Dick, stop! I don't understand," she sobbed in a loud voice. "Albert, help me!" she screamed.

A deafening noise roared through the room.

Ann suddenly felt Dick's strength dwindle. He tottered from her and crumpled to the floor.

"Ann," whispered the wounded man, "don't—don't ever see *it.*"

But his last wish was not to be granted, for Driscol, after firing, had lit the lamp and held it over the dead man.

With a cry, Ann cowered back, covering her eyes. The rays of light on Richard Berry's face had shown her a huge festering spot on one cheek, and part of his nose rotted away!

"*A leper!*" gasped Driscol.

It was evening, four months later; Captain Albert Driscol sat alone on the veranda of his house, wistfully watching the sun set behind two tiny, far-away islands.

"*Senor Capitan,*" said his Filipino *muchacho,* coming out on the porch, "the mail from the steamer, here it is."

"*Gracias, Feliciano,*" muttered Driscol absently, as he took the mail. His attitude immediately changed to one of eagerness, as he recognized Ann's familiar writing.

El Rancho, Solito, Cal.

Dear Albert:

I wrote you last from Honolulu. I am sorry I was unable to send you a letter from San Francisco; but the sight of that dear city recalled memories which were most distressing.

I am here on brother's ranch. How calm and peaceful it all is; no bugle calls, no dreadful news about restless natives; only sheep and cows grazing in the pastures, and the distant, ever-beckoning mountains.

Albert, I know it all now about poor Dick. I read an article in the Army and Navy gossip, which said that when he discovered he had leprosy (must have got it in 1900 in China, for, as perhaps you know, it takes a number of years to break out) he fled to the mountains to live his own life in freedom, and not in some leper prison. It is said that he made it appear as if he had been killed in a fight with the Moros, so that I might have my sorrow and *get over it.* The veracity of all this, the Gossip says, is based upon the confession of a captive *ladrone.* The rest, Albert, about Dick's taking to *vino,* going to pieces to the extent of joining a band of *ladrones,* in order to support himself, I refuse to believe.

Write me soon, Albert. What a dreadful, unknown hypocrisy our marriage was!

Ann."

The Devil's Fish

BY FREDERICH SIMPICH

From the beginning of time, all men have exacted the great penalty for the social outcast who violates the sanctity of the home. This is a story of the horrible penalty a white man pays to an Indian tribe for the unpardonable offense.

UT Meyer," Lutz complained, "I tell you this is something new — startling—and I want it. As the official naturalist with this expedition, I protest against discarding this unique specimen just because a fool Indian fears it may 'hoodoo' him!"

And he shook the odd, wriggling fish-like thing from its net into a camp pail and poured water on it to keep it alive.

During which the old Chief Wubi, plainly a much frightened Indian, continued his excited protests. For the thing Lutz had caught was not a fish at all, Wubi declared, but an Avenging Devil in fish's form and known to the Indians of the Isthmus as the "Keechi-Ro." For ages, he said, these sinister creatures had lived in their forbidden haunt—the deep green pool beside the river Mombrabo.

In vain did Meyer, the head of our party, seek to pacify the old Chief. Nothing short of the immediate liberation of the Devil's Fish would satisfy the frightened Indian. By the creed of his tribe, he warned us, any man is doomed who harms the Keechi-Ro; should he consent to our keeping the Devil's agent as a prisoner, some grave disaster must surely befall his tribe. He was astonished that Lutz, a learned white man, should thus dare defy the Evil Spirit.

"I think you'd better turn the fish loose, Lutz," admonished Meyer.

But Lutz was new to the Isthmus, with its swamps and superstitions. From books he knew much of the tropics, and back at the Varsity he had taken many prizes with his clever papers on wild animals. But he lacked experience with wild men! Wherefore he argued with wise old Meyer, who had studied savage peoples from the Congo to the Caribbean, insisting that the creature he had caught was but an odd young fish, and that the Chief's dire prediction was all rot.

"Of course Wubi's talk is rot," assented Meyer quietly, patiently. "But our expedition was sent here from Washington to cultivate the friendship of these Indians and to secure certain information from them; and if they dread this Keechi-Ro, and object to having us bring it near the village, the wise course for us is to put it back in the pool.

"Besides," he went on, after a moment, "that's not an unknown fish, Lutz. Your bureau at Washington knows of this hybrid, half sturgeon, half shark. And I'll tell you something else you don't know, even if

you are the official naturalist: that creature grows to prodigious size and is found nowhere on earth except in that green pool where you caught your specimen. It is one of those occasional stray creatures, remnants of prehistoric days, perhaps, stuck off in the nooks of the world, like the reputed hairy elephant of Alaska, which it would be risky to say too much about. You might be discredited!"

It was a hideous creature, this thing that Lutz had caught in his net—an unspeakably ugly object, with a clumsy head, tooth-lined jaws, lidless eyes and a tapering, placoid-covered body. And, fish or devil, it was only natural that old Chief Wubi, an untutored Indian of the Isthmian jungles, should fear it, even if it was "only a little young one," as Lutz insisted.

"Well, Meyer, you're the head of the expedition," growled Lutz, at last, "and since you're so squeamish about the feelings of your savage friend, I'll throw the fish back in the water." And he picked up the pail, wherein the odd creature still floundered, and walked out of our camp and down the river bank to the green pool—a deep basin hollowed from the low stone cliffs beside the Mombra-bo.

Wubi's fears subsided quickly, when he saw that the dreaded Keechi-Ro was really to be liberated. Finding the old man willing to talk now of tribal superstitions and folk-lore, themes of peculiar interest to Meyer in his ethnological researches, we listened intently to his strange recital. Squatting on the ground, native fashion, Wubi told us how in the old days of the Spanish invasion, his tribe had taken all prisoners and thrown them into the green pool, where a giant Keechi-Ro appeared and swallowed them bodily.

And he told us, too, that now, when a man broke faith with a maid of his tribe, the girl would be set adrift in a canoe to make her way down stream to the trading posts—an outcast; but that her male relatives would hunt down the man who had wronged her, and bind the wretch, and take him and cast him into the green pool to be eaten by its evil denizens. This human sacrifice, he said, seemed to appease the Evil Spirit, for after such a ceremony it was always a long, long, time before another maid would be cast adrift. He had seen the singular executions at the green pool on but two occasions in his life of three score wet seasons. And it had been no pleasant spectacle! With graphic gestures he showed us how the victims went down the monster's throat, headfirst, kicking their feet vigorously till the fish's tooth-lined jaws shut them in.

Evening fell as we sat talking with Wubi, and the women of the tribe began to come in from their work in the fields. Our camp was pitched on the bank of the Mombra-bo, a short distance below the Indian village of Eupac. Opposite us, low, steep cliffs faced the river, and in the fields back of these cliffs, the Indians grew their yams and yucca. In our weeks among the tribe, we had observed that drones were unknown—that even the Chief's family worked in the fields. And as old Wubi finished his recital, his family, consisting of his wife and five

daughters, appeared on the crest of the cliffs across the stream from us.

Stacking their crude hoes, the day's work done, they climbed gracefully down the steep bank to a jutting rock, at a point some thirty feet above the river. Save for their short grass girdles, all were naked.

Poising a moment, the mother, a vigorous woman of perhaps thirty-five, raised her shapely arms above her head and dived, swift and straight as a kingfisher, headfirst, in the Mombra-bo. In an instant she reappeared, shaking the water from her round head, and swam towards us with strong, easy strokes.

Then, one after another, the daughters, ranging from ten to sixteen years of age, supple, bronzed and beautiful, followed their mother into the stream, diving from the rock and swimming towards us.

It was a splendid scene, primitive, startling, as it must have been in the beginning. Dignified, natural, wholly unmindful of our gaze, the wild mother and her girls crawled from the stream onto the mossy bank before our camp, shaking the water from their glistening brown bodies and long, thick black hair.

"Ichi!" called Chief Wubi, and the tallest of the five girls, a perfect specimen of the Chocosee Indian, sprang lightly up the bank and stood respectfully before her father. As the old Chief was making some inquiry as to their work in the yam patches, Lutz came suddenly around our tent, returning from his errand to the green pool.

To our amazement, Ichi and Lutz exchanged some friendly words of greeting, the Indian girl smiling on our big, handsome companion with ill-concealed admiration. Now, by an unwritten law, it was understood among us that, no matter in what regions our expedition might find itself, or no matter how hospitable the natives, we were to hold ourselves absolutely aloof from the home life of the wild people—to get our needed information from the men and to ignore all others.

All of us, including Lutz, had worked for weeks to gain a necessary knowledge of the Chocosee dialect, but till this moment, we had not suspected that Lutz had been practising conversation with the Chief's daughter.

"I don't think much of their superstitions," growled Lutz, his mind still on the coveted rare fish, "but there certainly is class to their women folks!" and he beamed admiringly on Ichi.

Though Wubi knew no English, he saw the look of admiration that Lutz had bestowed on Ichi.

"Is she not beautiful?" asked the old man, proudly. "My enemies call me 'Chief-with-no-sons'; but soon my daughters will marry and I shall have sons in plenty."

Lutz turned abruptly, whistling tunelessly, and entered our mess tent.

Bidding Meyer and me good night, Chief Wubi followed his daughter into the path leading up to the village and the two were lost to our view in the swiftly darkening night.

We had planned to break camp next day. Meyer and I, with our boatmen and packers, were to drop down stream to the point where the Mom-

bra-bo flows into the Itrata, on its way to the Gulf of Darien. We had research work to do in that region and would establish our next camp at the junction of the two streams.

It had been agreed that Lutz should remain at Eupac, completing some photography and mounting his specimens. This task would occupy him for ten days, he had told us. At the end of that time he, too, was to come down stream and join us at the new camp.

When Wubi and his daughter had left us, Meyer sat silent and we entered the mess tent. I could tell by Meyer's troubled face that he was worried. He spoke scarcely a word during the meal, but Lutz chattered incessantly of his plans for the coming week. Suddenly it came to me that Meyer was unwilling to leave Lutz alone among the Indians. In some vague way, he seemed to feel that danger threatened.

While I was busy packing late that night, I heard Meyer outside the tent, talking earnestly to Lutz, in a low, kindly voice. The latter was plainly vexed at something Meyer had said. "I hope you don't think I'm fool enough to make *that* mistake!" he spluttered.

"It's for your own good, Lutz," Meyer answered. "I've worked among wild tribes for thirty years, now; and I tell you a white man's only safe bet, in any savage land, is to stick close to his duty, as prescribed by the *Bureau*. You must make friends of the men, of course, but don't play any favorites among the opposite sex; they must be ignored, absolutely."

At sunrise, we embarked in our loaded canoes for the voyage down stream. The natives were astir, as usual, long before sunrise, but practically the whole village left its daily work and flocked down to our camp to see us off. Chief Wubi came, rubbing his nose on the backs of our hands, after the manner of salutation among his tribe, and wished us a safe trip. His women folk came, too, bringing fruit and a jar of native wine, as a good-will offering from Chief Wubi.

As we floated out into the current, Lutz waved us a farewell from before his tent. Wubi and his family had taken their place beside the lone white man. "The Bureau should send only old, ugly men to the tropics," grumbled Meyer, enigmatically, as we gathered speed with the stream.

The crowd remained on the bank, shouting after us, till we reached the big bend below Eupac and were lost to their sight. Passing the green pool, we turned into the jungle-lined stream below and settled down to make ourselves comfortable for the long trip.

It is an unmapped region, this northern wilderness of Colombia. Few geographers know that in the rainy seasons an Indian can paddle from the Atlantic to the Pacific without porterage! Swamps, lagoons, creeks, are everywhere. Here and there rise ridges of high land, with scattered Indian villages, but for the most part swamps, shaded with moss-hung trees, trailing vines, and rank, tough grasses and reeds.

It was through such dismal regions that we made our way, after leaving

the hill country about Eupac. Sleeping in our canoes by night, using our head-nets for protection against the swarms of angry mosquitoes, and paddling and floating by day, we came at last to the river Itrata and made camp. Here was a better country, with many Indians, and many cultivated fields.

In the tropics, where man works or idles, time flies swiftly, for one day is like another. Almost before we realized it, ten days had passed, and we began to talk of Lutz and his coming. By then his work in Eupac should have been finished and in four days more he should be with us.

On that day, therefore, we stayed in camp, waiting to meet Lutz. But he did not come. So we waited another day, and still another; still Lutz did not come.

"We'd better go upstream," said Meyer, thoughtfully. So we packed a long canoe that same night and took three strong boatmen, our rifles and some food, and started at dawn.

"Lutz must be ill," commented Meyer at the end of our first day's ride upstream, "and we should hurry." So we slept and got an early start.

To rest the men, Meyer and I took a hand at the paddles. Paddling thus, in relays, we kept the canoe going rapidly ahead throughout the night. At sunrise, a breeze sprang up, blowing stiffly upstream, so we rigged a rude sail from a piece of canvas off one of our packs and increased our speed. We had made such good time, that by evening of the third day we were nearing Eupac, but still there had been no sign of Lutz.

By this time, Meyer and I were both alarmed. We had made a grave mistake, we now feared, in allowing Lutz to remain alone with the Indians.

Suddenly, from around the bend—the first big bend below the green pool—a canoe appeared, with someone in it. But no one paddled the craft; it swung and turned with the current, around and around slowly.

Meyer got out his glasses and for a full moment surveyed the approaching boat in silence.

"It's Ichi!" he exclaimed, in a strained voice, lowering his binoculars.

And it was. The canoe was nearing us now and we could see the girl, crouched motionless in the bottom of the boat, her stoic face set and expressionless, heedless of us, of everything.

We steered towards her boat and Meyer hailed her. But there was no reply. We could see into her canoe now; it held clay jars of native wine, quantities of fruit and yams, and a straw mat to sleep on. It was provisioned for a long voyage.

As our canoe bumped the derelict, Meyer reached out and grasped the edge of the swinging craft. "What is it, Ichi?" he asked, in the Chocosee dialect.

But the girl made no answer. Not once did she so much as even glance in our direction.

After a moment, Meyer gently pushed off the runaway canoe and it drifted back again with the current—bearing its silent, stricken passenger. There were tears in old Meyer's eyes, as he looked sadly at the retreating figure of the unhappy girl.

"This is bad business, I'm afraid," he muttered.

Without further words, we reached with one accord for our rifles, and quickly threw cartridges into their chambers. And up to the Mombra-bo we raced, the men bending their backs and fairly lifting the narrow canoe along.

We were almost abreast of the green pool when Meyer's keen eye caught a movement in the edge of the jungle and he gave a quick order to the men to run the boat ashore.

Wubi, with a number of Chocosees, all carrying long blow guns and darts, emerged suddenly from the jungle above us and hurried away from the region of the pool.

We took cover quickly, prepared to stand off any attack.

But the Indians showed no sign of hostility; on the contrary, they hastened away from us, running up the river bank towards their village.

Suddenly Meyer, who was slightly in advance of me and near the edge of the green pool, beckoned to me excitedly. I ran up, gripping my rifle, trembling with some vague, nameless fear. The reeds and moss about the stagnant pool were trampled and crushed, showing unmistakable signs of some recent, violent struggle. The green waters of the deep hole were strangely agitated, as if some large body had lately stirred them.

"My God!" cried Meyer, his voice breaking, "look! look over there!" And he pointed with shaking finger, and across the green pool, beneath overhanging vines, appeared slowly the dorsal fin and prodigious head, and the gray, lidless eyes of a monster —a giant Keechi-Ro!

Slowly the great bulk emerged from the green-scummed pool, rolling sluggishly, like a water-soaked log. And there, between its huge jaws, we saw a man's foot—*with a shoe on it!*

The Cub

BY GORDON JOHNSTONE

A cub reporter covering a murder story discovers a clue that looks like an exclusive story, but his man wouldn't stay dead.

THE unusual excitement on the part of the lethargic clerks made the Cub sit up and take interest. When he saw Brady, the house-detective, heading for the broad stairs like an A. A. U. sprinter, he was sure of a "story." The next instant, with the scent of game in his nostrils, the Cub was on his feet and trailing the officer. Up three flights they raced, ignoring the elevator. When they arrived at their destination, a group of chambermaids were huddled together in the hall, staring at the closed door. Brady knocked on the panel. No answer. He rapped again. Still no response. Then he tried the knob. The door was locked. He turned to the group.

"The pass-key," he said laconically.

A white-faced maid stepped out hesitantly and lost some time in removing the chain to which the keys were attached, from her waist. Already people were scurrying in the halls, but most of the guests were at dinner below. Brady turned the key in the lock. Then he opened the door—barely an inch. Again he waited and listened, for the space of a dozen heart-beats, while the group shrank back into the shadows of the hall. A little woman—with a nervous, timid manner—stopped to speak with the trembling maids. What she heard sent her screaming hysterically down the carpeted passageway. Brady turned to the group.

"You fools!" he growled fiercely. "Silence her!"

A white-aproned maid hurried after the guest. And then the door opened and closed behind the house-detective and the Cub.

Brady bent over the Thing on the floor. There was no movement—no stir. He looked at the dresser and then at the Cub.

"The mirror," he commanded briefly.

The Cub passed him the polished disk. Brady held it over the Thing's mouth for a full half minute. Then he raised it at arm's length so that the glare of the incandescent wall-light was reflected on its surface. It was as clear as a brilliant pool. Brady passed the glass to the Cub, who returned it to the dresser. Rising, he removed the receiver of the telephone. In the still room, the Cub could hear the voice at the other end, answering.

"Mr. Daniels," said the detective quietly, as though speaking to some one at his elbow, "this is Brady. 'Phone Police Headquarters—and the coroner."

Hanging up the receiver, he

crossed to a chair, picked up a bath-towel that hung over its back and dropped it gently over the blue-white face. Returning, he sat down, with that stoic quietness of big men that is almost a tenderness, and rubbed the index finger and thumb of his right hand thoughtfully. The Cub looked at the gruesome Thing on the floor and shoved both hands deep in his trousers pockets. He was a young Cub and the indifference was entirely assumed. Just behind his belt-line, there was a feeling, the very antithesis of his acquired nonchalance.

"A clear case, Brady," ventured the Cub.

The detective stared straight before him.

"Crystal."

And indeed it was, if appearances count for much. The Thing lay at full length on the soft maroon carpet. In one clenched, distorted hand, was a gleaming revolver. The red hole in his white dress-shirt told its own story. The Cub leaned against the dresser and crossed his shins. His roving eyes included the silent detective.

"I'd like to have a peek at his stuff, Brady," he smiled, with feigned disinterest.

"Nothing doing."

The Cub subsided. It was wiser to be quiet than ordered out. Fate—that grim enemy of the Cub—had played into his hands and might still shower her precious favors on him. He could afford to wait. When that fabled lady smiled, each new moment carried its own riches—and she seemed to be upon the verge of smiling now. It was by a miracle that he found himself in the hotel office when the shot, like the muffled bursting of a tire, sent a passing bell-hop scrambling to the desk.

The Cub had not been wallowing in luck lately. "News" seemed to be breaking wrong or not breaking at all, when he was in the vicinity. Of course there was always the "street stuff." There were also the tragedies of the common people, but the commoners have no—or little—romance according to Park Row standards. Their deaths were everyday affairs, vulgarly crude and invariably sordid. Even those abortive denouements—the work of gangsters—had, for the time being, shown a decided falling off, owing to a young mayor's rigid enforcement of the Sullivan law. Truly, such law-makers and young mayors were not in league with, or even hailing distance of, the lurid press. The Cub glanced at the heavy figure in the chair.

"Love affair, I guess," he ventured.

The answer that came back had a veiled sting.

"Don't know," returned Brady. "Ask the clerks."

Again the Cub pulled in his "feelers." Nor was he accepting hints. *Here* was the inspiration of his "story" and he knew it—not in the office. He would like—however much he might have trembled doing it—to examine the Thing's pockets. There was copy in them—letters, papers, cards, and perhaps—perhaps the motive! His fingers, cold and clammy as they were, fairly itched to be about their horrible business. But there was Brady—Brady, the sphinx.

The Cub glanced out of the corner of his eye at the little writing table in the corner near the window. Except for some scattered stationery—without mark or stain of ink—there was nothing but the black well and some pens. In his first rational moment in the room, he had noticed that it was devoid of those almost essential articles—photographs. Over a chair was a gray bathrobe, and a leather grip, partly open, was beside the chair upon which Brady was sitting. A soiled collar, of the rolled variety, from which the tie had not been removed, lay on the dresser. On the top of a military hairbrush, a cigarette had burned itself out, leaving its form in a trail of gray ash. In the half-open wardrobe hung a dark gray business suit under which a pair of rubbers lay, as though they had been thrown hastily in. Every lamp in the room and in the white tiled bathroom beyond was burning brightly, bringing the ghastly Thing out in bold relief, and magnifying every detail of the long black figure.

There was nothing of the looseness of reaction, of peace, or that repose that stamps itself with vivid clearness upon our memory, in the passing of a loved one. Here all was battle—conflict upon conflict—as though every vein and sinew had waged terrible war and had not ceased even in the moment of tremendous defeat. The sword of death had only stunned that cold body into its last final, rigid resistance, from which it would pass into its ultimate dissolution, unconquered and unforgiving.

The Cub removed one hand from his pocket and shoved his soft hat back on his blond head. He was anxious to get down stairs to the telephone, but more anxious to await the coming of the coroner. Then a positive identity would be established—and the rest was easy. As for motive, plot, and glaring head-lines for his "scoop," he already had that pushed away into one corner of his narrow head. "Give a Cub a lead and he'll make a best-seller," was a comment that might apply to him, in all truth. He was not lacking in imagination—that jewel of the newshound. However much he chafed, the Cub knew that he would not have long to wait. Bimburg, the coroner of the district, was known as something of a "live-wire." Indeed, many uncanny jokes had been passed in Police Headquarters over his swift activity. We will omit them, not relishing the humor that has a morgue for its stage-setting. Bimburg was a little man with a black, toothbrush mustache and a bald head. Business was written in his every action and he was abrupt even to brusqueness. But he was a good coroner—in these days of political parasites—and could avoid blushing when he signed the city's checks.

Brady's sharp ears caught the sound of rustling feet on the soft carpet of the hall. When he opened the door, Bimburg walked in followed by an assistant, a uniformed policeman, and the proprietor. All of them looked, not without suspicion, at the Cub. Then Bimburg turned to the detective.

"Anything disturbed?" he asked.

"Nothing," answered Brady, "but the towel."

Bimburg looked thoughtfuly at the Thing on the floor. His assistant posted himself at the head and watched his chief. The Cub crossed to the high dresser and leaned against it. Brady, the policeman, and the proprietor, backed up against the door. Bimburg looked at his assistant.

"Uncover it," he ordered briefly.

The towel was lifted and thrown into a corner of the room. Bimburg stood over the shrunken, gaping face. The staring eyes of the Thing gazed up into his own with the horror of the unknown in them. It was a young face, smooth shaven, and if the hanging jaw had been closed, might be rated handsome. The Cub, notwithstanding his pose as a hardened reporter, felt a nausea sweeping over him. The proprietor turned to Brady and the policeman. He had no relish for such sights. For the next ten minutes, Bimburg was busy with the Thing, and by that time, the revolver had been turned over to the policeman. The pockets of the still figure disclosed nothing. The Cub passed his hand over his eyes and rubbed his hot white forehead. Bimburg stooped, picked up the grip and turned the contents out on the white bed. Then he groped through neckties, pajamas, collars, shirts, and sundry other articles and shook his head. The assistant brought him the clothes from the wardrobe. Even the maker's tags had been removed. There was nothing—nothing by which the Thing could be identified. The Cub, who by this time was as nearly fainting as a man may get without actually dropping in his tracks, rested his elbow on the top of the high dresser, with his hand on his feverish forehead. Bimburg turned to his assistant.

"Have you tried the bathroom?" he asked.

The man had not and immediately disappeared. Bimburg joined the group at the door. The Cub started. Something soft and yielding moved under the linen cover on which his elbow rested. With secretive care he worked it out until the edge of a pale-gray envelope appeared. With slow, nervous fingers—covering his action as best he could by appearing to blow his nose softly—he lifted it from the dresser and eased it into his pocket. Scarcely had he accomplished this when the assistant returned from the bathroom and nodded negatively at his chief. The greater interest surging into the Cub's mind drove the nausea before it. Now he was in a perfect delirium to get away—to get a moment in which to examine that letter for he knew it contained the solution of the mystery. Bimburg rubbed his hands and looked at the proprietor.

"There's nothing we can do here," he said. "Let's go below."

The Cub could have wept for joy. It meant escape—telephone—the City Editor—and Fame. Like a fretful horse impatient to be in action, he gave them a little start, not wishing to betray his haste. Brady, who was left behind, smiled as the Cub left.

"Got a story?" he asked tartly.

The Cub looked at him with glowing eyes. There was a note of suppressed triumph in his voice.

"A thriller," he gasped. "A twentieth Century thriller!"

He did not see Brady's satirical smile, for he was well down the hall, the tails of his raincoat flying. When he reached the office, there was another pleasurable shock awaiting him. Not a rival, not a reporter, was in sight. It was an open field with no barriers. The Cub stooped over the register, pad in hand, and jotted down the name pointed out by the clerk. He also made a note of the city scrawled beside the signature. The next moment, he was bent double over the gray envelope in a corner of the writing room. He scanned both names—for they were not one—in amazement. The two poles could not be more widely apart. Against both was the word "Chicago." The letter had been sent to a hotel there and the man had registered from the western metropolis. The gray envelope was the true—the signature, the false. Concealment! But why? The Cub drew out the letter and without scruples, read it. When he had finished, he went back to the beginning. At the second reading, he got his inspiration—and the motive.

"I never want to see you again!" It was embedded in the middle of the letter. It was a feminine missive, in a girl's hand—a girl's, yet with occasional sentences that revealed the budding woman. Evidently, there had been the usual misunderstanding — a poor thing surely upon which to hang so grim a tragedy. But history was full of such errors—the great catastrophes of the little things. There was no surname at the bottom, only the signature of "Judith." Again the Cub glanced at the beginning. There was an address engraved across the top of the page in pale red letters. For a moment he sat in thoughtful study. And then it flashed on him. He remembered the street as being in Mount Vernon, a suburb. Then he headed for the telephone operator.

"Mount Vernon," he said, "information."

In another minute he was in the booth. He repeated the address and asked for the name of the party—and also the connection. The girl gave him the name of the subscriber but could not give him the call. It was a private 'phone and violating the rules of the office. The Cub thanked her and poked his head from the booth. Then he gave the operator the number of his paper.

"The City Editor," he said, when the voice of the office boy came in on the wire. And then he was in communication with his chief. For ten minutes he poured every morbid detail, with elaborate trimmings, into the receiver. He read the letter, including every comma and period, and then he told of his intentions. He would hop on a car and interview the girl.

"I'll phone you from there," he said, just before he hung up. "It'll be hot stuff."

The Cub took the subway train to the extreme end of the city. Then he descended and caught a passing suburban car. In an hour and a half from the time he left the hotel, he stood before a handsome frame house in the quiet residential section.

By the light of the nearby street lamp, he scanned the envelope and

then the number on the gate post. Pushing his way through, he climbed the broad steps and rang the bell. A colored maid opened the door.

"Is Miss Judith Ware in?" he asked, removing his hat.

It was a hazard, but that was the Cub's business, not to grope around in interminable questions. If the "Judith" of the letter was a guest, the maid might betray that fact.

"I'll see," she answered. "Won't you step in?"

The Cub, congratulating himself, accepted her invitation and passed through the portieres that she held open for him.

"What name, please?" she questioned.

"Gilmore," he returned; "Mr. Gilmore of the New York ——." The Cub named his paper.

The maid left him. The Cub stared at the red portieres. He was not as thoroughly at ease as he would have liked to be. For a moment, he half regretted his temerity. The full realization of the information he was about to deliver rushed in on him with all its deep meaning. After all, the Cub was not a thorough brute. Notwithstanding his jackal-like trade, there still remained some vague sense of the delicacy of his intrusion. And then loomed a spectre before his eyes—a spectre that took the form of the City Editor; and whatever scruples he had, faded into a background of nothingness. A soft, almost imperceptible rustle of silk came to his ears. When the portieres parted, the Cub instinctively rose. A dark-haired girl of undeniable charm stood silhouetted against the rich red folds of the hanging curtains. A white silk gown enveloped her long, lithe body, and a rose of unearthly vividness seemed to cling to the perfect curve of her waist.

"You wish to see me?" she inquired, her lips parting in a wistful smile.

The Cub hesitated. The beauty of the vision before him sent his wits wool-gathering. And then again, a spectre loomed up before his enraptured gaze, but this time it was the phantom of Self—Self, that craved, that fattened on nothing but Fame. The Cub's hand went to his pocket.

"Miss Ware," he said, "I'll state my business briefly. I'm a reporter —and I've come to ask you a few questions—if you'll be kind enough to answer them?"

The girl waved him back into his seat and crossed to the piano stool.

"Now," she smiled, resting one white hand on the keyboard.

The Cub leaned forward earnestly.

"Did you know John Barlow?" he asked.

The girl started and a warm flush swept into her soft cheeks.

"Why do you ask?"

The Cub rose and laid the letter in her hands.

The girl looked at the gray envelope while the warm blood in her face mounted to her pale forehead. With slow questioning gaze, she raised her eyes to the Cub. Gradually, and with scarcely an effort, she rose and stood with her back to the piano.

The Cub hastened to answer her unspoken question.

"Miss Ware," he said briskly, "that letter was found in the room of a

hotel in NewYork tonight. The man who received it shot himself."

The Cub was a fool—most Cubs are—and forgot where he was. The girl's hand with the clenched paper went swiftly to her breast and a cry, half-scream, half-sob, froze on her lips. Her face was whiter than her gown, with that frightful pallor of a bloodless flesh. A film was over her staring eyes and she swayed and seemed about to topple to the floor. The Cub sprang to her side. Weakly —ever so weakly, she waved him away.

"I'm all right," she said faintly, "all right—thank you."

Passing her hand across her eyes, the girl steadied herself by clutching the top of the piano. When she spoke, her voice was hollow and hopeless.

"Then he's—dead?"

The Cub gazed into a corner of the room.

"Dead."

The girl's sharp intake of breath was heard in the silence. A bell tinkled eerily somewhere in a distant room. The little gold clock on the mantle opposite seemed to have gathered strength for its monotonous echo. A light silvery laugh—the very quintessence of heart-happiness —came from the adjoining house. It was followed by the sweet lilting strains of a love-song, to a piano and cello accompaniment. A door opened at the back and the soft measured steps of the maid passed the portieres, and then the turn of the heavy knob and a man's voice in inquiry. Like a sleep-walker being awakened, the girl's eyes gazed vacantly before her and her whole body shivered as though a draft of street air had reached her.

Again the maid's voice and the deep resonant answer of the man. The girl's body stiffened as though it had come in contact with an electric battery and a smile bordering on dementia swept over her face. The next minute her voice rang through the room.

"John!"

The Cub jumped nervously for the portieres and came in collision with a tall dark figure in evening clothes. With blanched face, he staggered back into the room, trembling from head to foot. The old nausea swept over him. It was the Thing come back —back from the nether-world. The intruder looked at the girl.

"Judith."

The voice was rich and even strident in its tone—anything but a ghostly timbre.

A moment later, the girl was sobbing hysterically on the shoulder of his coat.

"Oh, John,—John," she cried in a passion of happiness, "he told me you were dead—that you had shot yourself—in a hotel in New York. He's a reporter, and he brought this letter—my letter to you. Oh, it isn't true—it isn't true—it isn't true."

And then her words came fast and incoherently. The man took the letter and a faint smile crept over his face.

"Yes, I remember," he said. "I've written the hotel." He turned to the Cub. "Friend," he added, "if you don't mind a bromide, I think you're *de trop*. Good-night."

The Cub lost no time in making his exit. His brain was doing a perfect jig as he headed disconsolately for the nearest telephone. Before he had a chance to explain, the City Editor jumped in on him.

"Say, Gilmore," he said, over the wire, and his voice had a raucous, vicious snap, "I've had Fraenkel (an old reporter) follow up that 'scoop' of yours—and YOUR BILLET D'AMOUR FRIEND SLEPT THERE LAST NIGHT. YOU'RE FIRED."

"Oh, Hell," muttered the Cub in the lapels of his raincoat as he pushed his way through the suburban mud for a car.

The Sword of Flame

BY MARSHAL SOUTH

Among his curios, a collector has a gigantic Eastern sword of bloody history. Its baleful influence gives him a night of adventure he did not soon forget.

THERE was a sudden crash; a fragile little Japanese vase upon a side table shivered in a shower of fragments across the carpet; something heavy clattered from the table and fell with a thud upon the floor.

Trevor sprang to his feet with an exclamation, cutting short his cousin's monotonous dreams of success in the clothing business, and picked up the Sword of Flame from among the bits of smashed porcelain.

"I wonder what on earth made the thing fall," he said, balancing the heavy blade in his hand and looking curiously at the place on the wall from which it had fallen. "I had fastened it almost too securely, I thought."

His cousin, Maurice Simpkins, shallow-faced, correct, self-satisfied and prematurely stooped, arose from his chair and peered near-sightedly at the weapon through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Ah, I see!" he said. "It is the sword that has fallen and broken that beautiful little vase. What a pity! I had not noticed that you had such a murderous thing hung on the wall; really, you should be more careful in the way you arrange your trophies; that vase must have been worth a considerable sum. It is a pity to mix objects of value and barbarism together. What might the vase have been worth?"

"Oh, a hundred dollars or so," said Trevor shortly. "Why would the fellow always persist in dragging dollars and cents into his conversation?" he wondered. "But the Sword of Flame is of more value to me than fifty vases. What made it fall, I wonder?"

He mounted on a chair and examined the hooks from which the weapon had hung. "That's queer. The little brass chains have been cut clean through. Wonder what caused it? They were strong enough to hold twenty times that weight. It's most extraordinary—must have been something weak in the metal; though it's queer that they should both be cut in the same way."

His cousin was examining the stout gold-chased hilt of the heavy, discolored steel blade, peering at it with much the same interest that he would have displayed in the examination of a peculiar sample of cloth. "One of your Eastern curios, I presume. There does not seem to be any inscription upon it. What did you say it was called?"

Trevor got down from his chair and again took up the sword. "It is called 'The Sword of Flame,'" he

said. "No, there is no inscription upon it; *that* is inside."

He was working with his fingers upon the hilt and presently the end of it came off, revealing a cavity from which two shriveled objects rolled into his palm; he extended his hand beneath the light. "There," he said, "is the eye of the original owner of the sword and with it is the eye of the man who caused it to be cut out."

The other shrank back from the sight with a shrug of disgust. "Ugh! Are those really human eyes? How can you touch the horrible things? I can't imagine why you keep such a beastly thing around. Where did you get it?"

Trevor was poking and turning the withered objects in his palm reflectively. "I got it in Canton; it was given to me as a great treasure by a man I used to know there. It may be a fake, of course, but I would not part with it for its weight in gold. This dry, black-looking one is reputed to be the eye of the Rajah."

"What Rajah?"

"Oh, the Rajah who figures in the history of the thing. You see, this sword is reported to be hundreds of years old. According to the legend there was once an Indian Rajah who, for some reason or other, in a fit of ungovernable rage caused the eye of one of his nobles to be cut out as a punishment for some trifling offense. The unfortunate man had been one of the Rajah's most faithful adherents; the monstrous act of cruelty caused him to become his bitterest enemy.

"He fled from the palace, carrying the ball of his destroyed eye with him. From that day, the maimed man plotted the Rajah's downfall. He caused this sword to be made with the hollow hilt in which he enclosed the ball of his eye, swearing to add to it the eye of his enemy before he died. The culmination of the affair came some years later when, having perfected his plans, the owner of this sword, at the head of a powerful armed force, surprised the palace, overpowered the Rajah's bodyguard, and entering the room where he lay sleeping, cut out his right eye with the point of the sword and afterwards slew him with the same weapon. Since then, according to legend, the sword has had a very varied and bloody history. There is reported to be a weird influence of hate about it which, in the hands of certain people susceptible to its power, blazes into fury. It has headed more than one merciless war since the day it was first forged; that is the reason it is called 'The Sword of Flame.' Rather a dramatic history, isn't it, even if it is not true? which is, of course, quite possible; lots of these things are fakes."

He tipped the withered eyeballs back into their cavity and screwed on the end of the hilt. Simpkins watched him thoughtfully. "Do you know," he said, wrinkling his forehead and peering blinkingly at Trevor, "that story appeals to me as being quite remarkable, but while you have been telling it, an entirely new and practical thought has occurred to me; this is an age of practical utility, you know. Curiously enough, that sword is almost the replica in design of the trade-

mark of "Sword Brand" shirts; lend it to me for a week; it could be made the centre of quite an attractive window display."

"No," snapped Trevor savagely; "I will not. The sword will never leave my possession. What do you take me for? Do you think I would have it hung up among a lot of damned shirts to provide vulgar curiosity for a crowd of addle-pated clowns? What do you think I am?"

"Oh, if you don't like it, of course not; but it seemed to me such an excellent opportunity for a good advertisement. Doubtless, I could have a wooden one made which would serve the purpose almost as well. Let me feel the weight of it."

With a sensation of disgust and reluctance, Trevor handed over the weapon. The lean white fingers of the clothing merchant closed over the hilt.

"A peculiar weapon," he remarked, swaying it back and forth. "How heavy it is! Really, after all, I think a wooden copy would serve the purpose better. How horrible to think that many people may have been killed by this very weapon; there is certainly a peculiar interest in handling it." He drew back his arm suddenly and swung the sword through the air in a savage whistling sweep; Trevor sprang back in startled alarm, —the blade had swung perilously close to his head. "Take care! Take care!" he cried. "You will do some damage with the thing if you act that way. This is not the place for sword swinging of that kind."

Simpkins laid the blade down on the table. His pallid face was a shade paler than usual and his weak watery eyes were unusually bright. "I am sorry if I alarmed you," he said, somewhat nervously, "but there certainly is a strange fascination about the weapon. Waves of fire seem to flow out of the handle and burn through one's whole body. Does it affect you like that?"

"No," said Trevor shortly; "I cannot say that it does." He took the Sword of Flame from the table and stood it carefully away in the corner behind a small Japanese cabinet, reflecting that idiots like Simpkins and deadly weapons like the Sword of Flame were best kept apart.

But Simpkins's interest appeared to have been stirred. During the remainder of the evening, and in the pauses of his monotonous chatter about his schemes for making the house of Simpkins & Co. famous in the clothing world, his blinking eyes were turned often to the corner where the ominous hilt was just visible in the shadows behind the top of the cabinet, and when the two men parted for the night, he returned abruptly to the subject.

"I suppose you would not care to sell that sword, or even loan it to me for a while?"

"My dear fellow," said Trevor, a trifle irritably, "I would not part with the sword for any amount you could name, and as for lending it, why, you know I neither borrow nor lend; that is one of my strictest principles. Besides, what earthly good would it do you? You are not interested in such things."

"Oh, well, of course—" began his cousin, and broke off the sentence

abruptly. "I was looking at it from a business point of view," he concluded, after a pause.

"That's the way you look at everything. However, I'm afraid that the clothing trade and the Sword of Flame won't mix. The combination is bad. Take care you don't dream about it. Good night."

In his own room, in the east wing of the rambling old house, Trevor flung up the window and leaned out to indulge in some savage reflections. "Why was it that he was called upon to suffer the infernal Simpkins?" he asked himself. One of the chief burdens of his rare sojourns at home was the fact that he was compelled to endure periodic week-end visits from his cousin; week-end visits that were an unutterable bore. Trevor loathed the man. Wander-loving, wide-minded, adventurous, red-blooded, and fired with a generous allowance of the old fighting fever of romance as he was, Simpkins nauseated him. The stoop-shouldered, bland, peering proprietor of the house of Simpkins & Co., with his endless chatter of business and dollars, filled him with a sort of disgusted repulsion. A proud and restless spirit, made to breathe the air of freedom, and with a deep-rooted aversion to the paltry and sordid, Trevor could not endure his cousin. "Had the man the soul of a louse?" he asked himself. "Was there nothing in his life besides his smug respectability and his paltry greed? The Sword of Flame—that grim length of steel with its sinister reputation and bloody history—an advertisement for shirts! Good God!" Trevor found himself half wishing that the head of the respected Simpkins had occupied the position of the Japanese vase when the blade had fallen.

Presently, dwelling upon the matter of the sword, his mind grew reminiscent; Simpkins and his paltriness faded away and his thoughts harked back to India, the land of the blade's origin, and to the gloomy jungle-grown ruins of the ancient city in which, tradition said, the first owner had taken his grim revenge.

How clearly his memory could reconstruct the scene of that one vivid moonlight night he had spent among the ruins, the silence broken only by the whispering rustle of the jungle and the ghastly moonlight gleaming like silver upon the still surface of the little lake, casting weird ghostly shadows among the broken columns and piles of moss-grown stones.

It was a night much like the present, he remembered. Indeed, with a little imagination he could reconstruct the familiar scene before him and imagine himself once more back among the ruins, leaning from the window in the crumbling wall which, according to the vague legend, had been that of the Rajah's private apartment. Then, as now, the moon, almost full, had sailed cold and chilling in the crisp clear sky; then, as now, the shadows had been black and goblin-like; the leaves uneasy with a lonely rustle. Even the little pleasure lake in the grounds below him seemed to duplicate that other lake deep in the heart of the Indian jungle. The dark masses and shadowy trunks of the trees supplied the places of the stone columns and the massive

piles of ruined ramparts. Instinctively Trevor glanced across the lake to the right, and here again the similarity was oddly complete; the bulk of a wooden observation tower took the place of the crumbling stone tower of the ancient temple.

Struck by the strange parallel of the scene, which had never occurred to him before, Trevor let his imagination wander yet more deeply into the mystery of the past. Had it been such a night as this, he wondered, that fatal night far back in the forgotten centuries, when vengeance, s ft-footed and fury-hearted, had stolen through the shadows of the gloomy corridors on its deadly mission?

His vivid imagination re-created the long-dead tragedy: the sudden rush of bare feet upon the stone floor; the startled outcry of the surprised guards, cut short by the savage shearing thud of falling blades; the wide-flung curtains of the inner door; the startled fear in the eyes of the suddenly awakened man upon the couch; the vengeful glitter of the Sword of Flame, and the savage sweep with which its bloody purpose was concluded.

With something like a shiver Trevor turned his back on the ghastly moonlight and went to bed.

It was owing to two habits deep-rooted in Trevor's nature, that the grim death which came stealing upon him through the shadows of that night did not overtake him in his sleep.

The first was his entire lack of orderly neatness and the indiscriminate fashion in which he strewed boots and wearing apparel about the room, and the other was his acquired habit of awakening with every sense on the alert at the slightest unusual noise.

It was the slight scraping of a carelessly flung boot being pushed across the floor by the gently opening door, that brought his eyes open with a jerk, to behold the peril that was upon him.

In the doorway, looming white and ghostly against the dark shadows of the passage beyond, stood the figure of a man, a great sword gleaming in his right hand.

Trevor cleared the bed at a bound, clutching for the light switch, and as the blazing rays flooded the room and the form of the stealthy intruder, he recognized Simpkins—Simpkins, clad in his pajamas, barefooted and with a glare of awful malevolence frozen upon his features, the Sword of Flame tensed grimly in his grasp.

Trevor's brain moved swiftly. Quick as thought, he snatched the bed coverings into a pile, and flinging them full in the face of the onrushing man, sprang for a weapon.

In the rack in the corner, among a confused collection of canes, foils and golf sticks, lay a heavy Japanese sword. Trevor snatched it up, and tearing the razor-edged weapon from its sheath, swung round to meet his crazed assailant.

"Maurice!" he shouted, "Maurice! Stand back! Are you mad?" A choking snarl, more brute than human, was the only response, and recovering from the momentary check of the blankets, his cousin leaped upon him, whirling the great sword in a murderous sweep.

The two blades met mid-air in a crash and sparkle of steel, and thereafter, Trevor found neither time nor breath to attempt to reason with his antagonist, even had the blazing light in his cousin's eyes not told him that such was hopeless.

Simpkins was insane; that fact needed no second thought. Some sudden wave of blazing madness had fallen upon him, and with it, he had acquired more than a maniac's usual ferocity and strength. Ordinarily a flabby, listless, slow-moving individual, he had suddenly become transformed into a demon of activity and muscular power. The Sword of Flame was no child's weapon; it was forged for the strength of a far different arm than Simpkins's; but now, in the clothing merchant's demented grasp, the heavy blade swept and sang like a willow wand, with a lightning-like rapidity and skill that struck a chill fear to Trevor's heart, good swordsman though he was.

Here was no exhibition of fancy sword play—the blades were too heavy and the attack too furious for that. But neither was it maniac ferocity matched against trained skill. In the savage rasp and jar of the meeting swords, Trevor began to realize with dismay, that the other was perfectly familiar with every trick and guard; he was master of them all and his skill grew with every glittering sweep of his terrible weapon.

Trevor was fighting for his life and with but a slim chance. He fully realized it, and the fact lent the strength of desperation to his arm. The heavy Japanese sword in his hand whirled and guarded and smote with a rapidity and power which only the superhuman energy of despair could have supplied. But in spite of it all, he was weakening; his guard was being beaten down; he was being forced back.

Suddenly Trevor became aware of something that laid an icy chill upon his heart. The revivified spirit of the revengeful old Rajah possessed Simpkins, and he hurled vile epithets and curses at his opponent in fiery Hindustani.

The realization struck Trevor with an unreasoning dread and terror. What devil business was this? What thing was it that he was fighting?

A queer numbness began to steal along his sword arm; it rose less swiftly with each stroke to meet that tireless crashing blade. Dark flecks and confusing shadows began to play across his eyes; the corners of his vision began to cloud thickly. He retreated slowly across the room, his sight fast dimming to a haze through which loomed only his cousin's blazing eyes and the vision of the moving sword, leaping and glowing like a long tongue of ruddy flame.

Moving backwards, Trevor collided suddenly with the reading table, it went over with a crash, and as he staggered back among the tangle of legs and the litter of overturned books, he was aware of the flaming sword leaping high above him in one final resistless sweep.

For some reason or other, however, the blow did not fall. There was a metallic crash and rattle; the fiery sword poised and wavered for an instant in mid-air as though struggling with some obstruction, and in that

instant, Trevor, with a last despairing burst of strength, drove his blade below it with a great shearing sweep.

There was the soft, jarring thud of parting flesh and bone, a clink of metal, a shrill scream and the crash of shattering glass; the Sword of Flame flew hurtling through the pane of the closed window, while Trevor, staggering forward in sheer exhaustion, fell headlong across the moaning figure of the man who had wielded it.

It is unfortunate that the proprietor of to-day's prosperous house of Simpkins & Co. should have lost his right hand, but such is the fact. And Trevor, being well aware that he owes his life to the chance which, on that grim night, tangled the Sword of Flame for an instant with the steel chain of his low-hanging reading lamp, has no desire to recover either hand or weapon. They lie together; the bony fingers of the one, fast locked about the hilt of the other, at the bottom of the little lake.

the game, huh?" he asked, his voice ugly.

Stotesbury squared his shoulders ever so slightly and raised his eyebrows. "Mr. Gandil, the best thing you can do is to send someone up and inform the man that you wish to see him immediately!"

There was always a certain dignified manner of supreme masterfulness about Stotesbury, and Gandil, after looking at him closely for a second, called a boy and sent him above with the message that Mr. Hevron was to come down to Mr. Gandil's private office right away.

In very short order, the actor appeared. He was the same fellow we had seen a bit over an hour ago playing the part of the sheriff in "The Lone Bandit of Red Gulch Canyon"—the same tall, slim, handsome chap who stalked about with such a self-possessed and arrogant air. I noticed now, that there was a supercilious turn to his lips and an offensive glitter in his veiled eyes.

He nodded to Gandil almost disdainfully—he was, you know, a much-petted star. "Well," he asked lightly.

Gandil jerked his head toward my companion. "Professor Stotesbury has asked to speak with you!"

Hevron turned slowly about and eyed my friend with his cool, deliberate gaze. "To just what may I—ah—attribute the pleasure of this visit, Professor—Professor Stewberry?" he drawled, a sort of languid sneer on his lips, as he purposely mispronounced the name.

Stotesbury allowed the vestige of a smile to play across his lips. "Simply, Mr. Hevron, to the fact that I have just had the good fortune of witnessing your remarkable performance of the sheriff in the play called 'The Lone Bandit of Red Gulch Canyon'—the *very* remarkable performance which you gave—incidently—with the help of Mr. Tyson Remick playing opposite you as Sandy Pete!"

Stotesbury, as he finished, clicked his jaws together with a little snap and thrust his head forward the least bit, his eyes looking straight into those of the other with a hard expression that I had never seen in them previously.

Hevron, for some reason, was apparently taken off his guard—whatever it might be he was guarding. He stepped back, his hands unconsciously going to his sides and closing spasmodically, his eyes widening, and his face going white and whiter as he bit his lips nervously.

Stotesbury acted quickly. He sprang forward with an agility I had not known he possessed, grasping Hevron by the arm and drilling in his fingers so that the actor winced. Also, there was the same hard, cold look in his eyes that had suddenly appeared there but a moment ago.

"Hevron," he snapped, "just exactly why did you kill Remick, eh? *Why did you brutally murder him?*"

The actor tried to pull away. "I—I didn't—I didn't! I—I— It was an accident, I tell you—an accident of the stage manager! I—he—made a mistake—a real bullet was substituted—I—it was an accident—an accident, I tell you!"

Martin Hevron was really an ex-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 52]

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ceedingly good picture actor, and as such he was known from one end of the country to the other. Now, though, his art seemed to have entirely deserted him and left him utterly helpless. Perhaps Stotesbury had figured all this out—the sudden abrupt question, now brought up after two years, upsetting his nerves completely.

"What—what do you mean, sir—what in God's name do you mean?" asked Gandil excitedly, gazing wide-eyed at them both.

Stotesbury did not answer. Instead, he renewed his grip on Hevron's arm and continued in that sharp voice that was so new to me. "Yes, exactly why did you purposely murder Tyson Remick? Was it some woman? Was it money? Was it some private feud? What—what? Not that it matters, you understand, for I know that you wilfully murdered him—know it and have the proof—*indisputable proof!*"

The actor was panting hard. His eyes were sort of wild. He had, without doubt, gone entirely to pieces, perhaps on account of the long strain under which he had labored. "What—what proof have you got—*what proof?*" Then, apparently realizing that he had said the wrong thing, he savagely repeated, time and time again, in a hurried, mechanical voice, "You—you lie! You lie, you lie, you lie, you lie!"

Gandil, at this, instinctively felt that something was wrong in Hevron's eager questions and savage denial in regard to the proof.

"My—my God, Professor," he gasped with unsteady lips, "what is it—what in Heaven's name is it?"

Stotesbury's fingers bit deeper; his eyes narrowed more; his voice was like the positive, incisive thrust of a deftly-wielded rapier. "Hevron, I'll admit that you played the game cleverly—that you planned the thing in a truly masterly way. There was just one thing, though, that you did not take into consideration—and that one thing was the possibility of a professor who teaches the deaf and dumb to read and use their lips would see your film; no, you did not take that into consideration. Everything else was perfect for you—there was even a strong breeze blowing in your direction so that the camera man could not hear your speech. You know what it was, of course—don't you?"

Hevron's face, now, was deathly. Every muscle in it was twitching. He did nothing but glare at Stotesbury with crazed eyes—eyes that were wide and wild.

My friend spoke slowly. "The words that you uttered, Hevron, were such as should never have appeared in the film: 'Damn you, Remick. I've got you at last—got you where you can't prove anything on me—got you where I want you—to send you to Hell!'—then the gun flashed!"

He paused a moment, while Gandil and I looked on with incredulous eyes.

Again came Stotesbury's voice—slow and calm and even. "Well?"

Then it was that Martin Hevron crumpled and went to pieces. "My—my God! Have mercy—have mercy! I—I loved her—I loved her and she married him—I—I went wild, I—Have mercy—have mercy!"

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ness any more," he reasoned. "I ain't got time to worry about other people's troubles—not with this cutover coming on." He was talking to himself there in the manhole. But he could not dismiss the thought of the impending danger into which she was blindly going. He was not so conscious now of his outraged love, as of his concern for her safety.

"I wish she hadn't thrown me over," he added whimsically, and a sort of lump came up in his throat as he remembered their old love days.

"By God, I've got to stop this thing!" he cried, starting up.

He climbed hurriedly out of the manhole, took a quick look around, and seeing no one to detect him, ran toward the corner drug store.

He must get to a telephone and warn her. Even then she might not believe him. He hurriedly called the number and his hopes sank when some one said she had just gone out. He had been too slow—had fallen down.

The drug store clock showed thirty-five minutes after eleven as he came out of the booth. He must get back to his post. He wondered where she was now, and felt the flush that was hidden under the grime on his face.

An inspiration flashed into his mind as he stood on the sidewalk.

"Kid, how quick can you get me down town on that thing?" he asked the messenger who was tinkering with his motorcycle.

"Oh, fifteen minutes. Where do you want to go?" was the reply.

"On North Street," he faltered, and felt like slapping the grinning boy. "Get me there in ten minutes and I'll give you this dollar," he said briskly.

"You're on." And he was.

Away they went. He never remembered much of that ride. It reminded him of the time he got eleven hundred volts from a hot wire—a black streak; the jerks; some flashing lights;—and the pavement of North Street was flying under them.

"Stop here," he gasped.

The motorcycle careened up to the curb, coming to a stop just as a taxicab was driving away from the entrance to a building. Glancing at a name plate on the door, he pushed it open and entered.

No one was in sight, but as he hurried back toward the lights, he saw something that quickened his racing pulses. It was the clerk; he stepped out into the corridor and stood looking squarely at the advancing helper, in whom he must have recognized something of primitive danger, for he wheeled and walked quickly toward the rear.

The helper pushed open the door to the cloak room and stood there, looking at Helen, who was removing her hat before a mirror.

She saw his reflection and turned in astonishment.

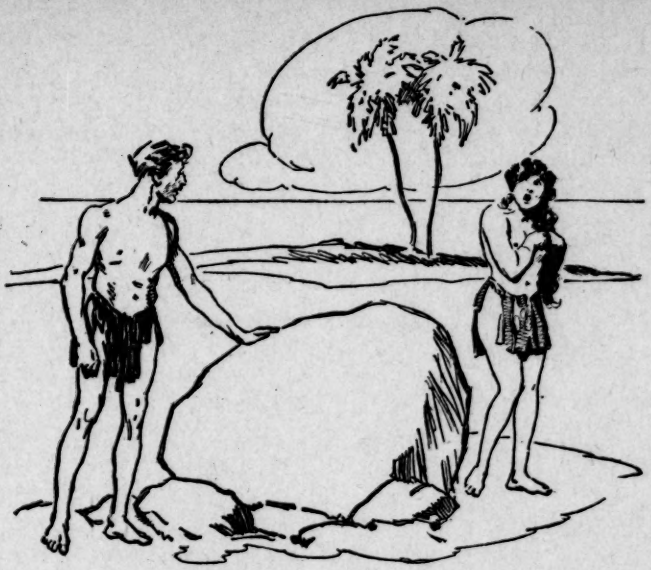
"Why, Jim! you haven't come to supper, have you?"

"Why not?" he parried hotly; the doubt in her voice stiffening his pride.

"Not looking that way," and she was laughing at his uncouth appearance, contrasting sharply with the rich surroundings.

"There ain't no supper, Helen;—not the kind you think. He's only

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 56)



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fooling you," he said roughly.

"What do you mean?" she stammered. "We are waiting for the others!"

"Waiting for nothing. Where's he gone?" demanded the helper, now master of the situation.

"To reserve the tables—and get us something to drink," she faltered. "Everybody drinks—a little—before New Year's supper; he said so."

"You must get out of here, Helen. Believe me; you must believe me, girl."

She read the earnestness in his eyes and manner.

"Don't argue," he hurried on. "Please come now; it's for you. And I've got get back to that cutover."

"The cutover!" she gasped, "tonight?"

"Yes, and I've—we've got to go now. We've both got to be there."

They were hurrying out together.

"Where are we?" she weakly asked, and thanked the dim light of the corridor for concealing her flush of shame and mortification.

"Not where you belong," and he quickly began telling her of overhearing the telephone conversations and the race down town against time.

She realized now and her heart was singing.

"And you did it—you came just for me, Jim?" she said.

"Of course, I came just for you," bluntly replied the helper with mild surprise, for he knew nothing of the ways of a maid's heart.

But he saw something besides the light of the arc, shining in her upturned eyes, as they stood outside. Then suddenly, she was crying on his rough coat as he crushed her in his arms and kissed her.

He was quickly brought to earth and stern realities.

"We've got to ride that thing back, Helen. A street car'd never get us there in time.

"I'll leave it at the drug store," he called at the boy, as they whirled away on the motorcycle, unmindful of his protests.

"Carry me to the Exchange, first, if you have time," she pleaded over his shoulder, as they got under way. He nodded and moved the spark up to where the machine, skimming over the pavement, seemed as if it would fairly crawl out from under them.

But a third passenger rode with them that night: misfortune. And something went wrong with the motor. The engine gave a few gasps and choked. The helper tinkered a bit, but there was no use. Every minute now was precious. He rolled the machine to one side.

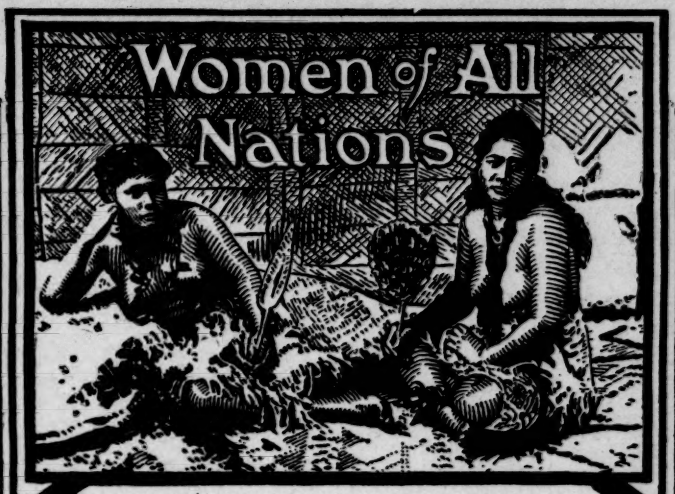
"I'll beat it on foot; maybe there'll be a car along soon; you can catch it." He dared not wait.

"No! I'll go with you," she began, firmly, then pleaded, as she saw his forbidding look: "I can walk—or run. There's no car—till twelve o'clock."

He had no reply to this logic and only kissed her.

At first, they walked rapidly, then spurred on with impatience, ran, shoulder to shoulder. On and on, their feet striking on the pavement of the deserted street—a startling sound on the night air. Curious pedestrians turned and stared open-mouthed.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 58)



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And the runners; against their pounding ear drums, smote an awful sound, when its import was realized.

It was the whistles. From one end of the city to the other they shrilled and screeched and roared, and the blast and boom of fireworks rose with the din.

The New Year! Puny man was trying to officiate at an event that had been occurring for countless cycles before his conception, and would continue as long after his dust had mingled with the earth that gave him birth.

Lights were flashing up. They saw them through the windows as they ran and knew what it meant. Knew it so vividly, they could almost see the confusion around the big new switchboard, all ablaze with line signal lights, flashing from a thousand impatient telephones; but helpless as a rent ship, because one man had not been at his post.

They rounded the last corner and their thumping hearts sank in despair. For there was his chief, the cableman, just arrived and peering down into the deserted manhole.

He whirled in astonished wrath on the helper.

"Where the hell—?" and then he saw the girl.

The helper slid through the opening into the hole, and in a moment his saw was biting down through the soft lead sheath and softer copper wires of the big cable. He could feel the little shocks from the iron saw handle, as each severed wire, freed from the dead end cable, thrilled with the subtle life-like flow of electricity from the new Exchange.

Then he stiffened himself for the storm and climbed slowly up out of the hole.

But somehow, the cableman understood now. He must have remembered the little girl of the village, for he was holding her hand in his great hairy paws, as she cried softly.

"Here, you," he tried to say sternly to the emerging helper, but his voice was a bit husky. "You two kids go over to the drug store, where it's warm. Besides, there'll be something doing around here in a minute or two."

It was too late, though, for even then the superintendent's car dashed up and that worthy tumbled out of it, fairly breathing fire between his clenched teeth.

"But how came the job botched up?" the superintendent was insisting, after the cableman had pacified him a bit.

"I guess my watch was slow, when he set his by it," said the cableman simply.

Then the wise old superintendent looked at the cableman and the helper, and the demure operator standing by.

As he was getting into his car, he turned, and with a dry little Irish smile, said, "A happy New Year to all of you!"

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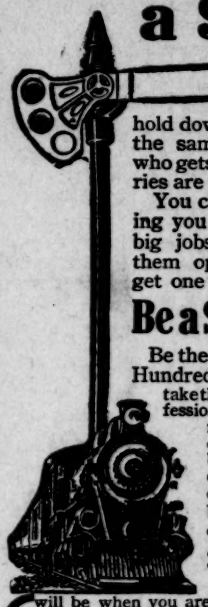

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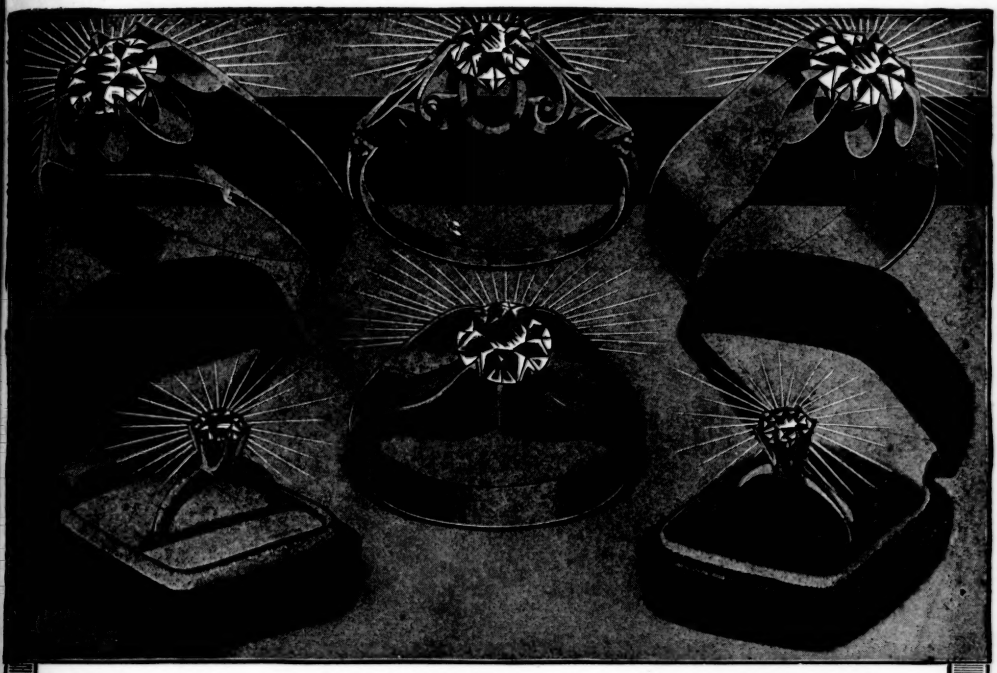

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